

KEPT WOMAN

VIÑA DELMAR

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By the same Author

BAD GIRL

LOOSE LADIES

KEPT WOMAN

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HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY

NEW YORK

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY QUINN & BODEN COMPANY, INC., RAHWAY, N. J.

For Edmund and Gretta D'Orsay

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CHAPTER ONE

SOME one was coming up the walk. It was Hubert. Mrs. Scott saw him and said to her son, "Here comes your father." Her tone was that of one who says, "Everybody has a cross to bear."

Young Hubert selected a magazine from the many upon the table. Mrs. Scott left her cozy chair at the fireplace and seated herself at the desk. She gave herself over to a deep and thorough examination of the telephone bill.

Hubert Scott let himself in with his latch-key and closed the door noisily behind him. He paused in the foyer and as he placed his coat and hat on the bannister rail listened expectantly for his family to greet him. Nobody spoke and after all he was neither surprised nor hurt. Every evening now for nine years he had stood expectantly in the foyer listening for his family to greet him. It was always he who spoke first.

"Hello," he said.

Young Hubert said hello without looking up from his magazine. Mrs. Scott said nothing. The telephone bill was holding her attention.

"It's like a morgue in here. What do you people do all day? Sit around and look wise?"

No answer. Hubert Scott took himself off to the kitchen. He was thirsty and wanted a glass of water.

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The Scotts had a nice kitchen. Warm and clean. Nellie was basting the roast as he entered.

"Hello, Nellie."

"Good evening, Mr. Scott."

"What are we going to have for dinner, Nellie?" Mr. Scott's voice was loud and jovial. It made Nellie smile.

"'At a girl, smile," he commanded. "It don't cost a nickel and it makes everybody feel better." Mr. Scott's loud voice had grown louder as though he wanted it to be heard in the living-room. "Smile. People who don't smile once in a while make me sick."

Nellie burst out laughing at his words. Mr. Scott always amused her. "Never did work in a house where there was such a funny man," she thought as she watched Hubert gulp the water. "Lord, you'd think Mrs. Scott would be laughing fit to die all the time."

Mr. Scott set the glass down on the sparkling white drain-board and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "What did you say there was for dinner, Nellie?"

"Roas' beef, Mr. Scott."

"It might be roast beef today but it'll be hash tomorrow."

Nellie found this too amusing to bear with dignity. She leaned weakly against the wall and howled with delight.

Hubert left the kitchen. He would have to go upstairs and tidy himself before dinner. As he passed through the foyer he looked again at his family. They were still sitting as he had seen them last.

"Don't make so much noise," he called to them as

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he ran upstairs. His wife's room was directly before him on the second floor. He looked in. He always looked in her room. If she didn't want him to look in, she ought to close the door, he reasoned. Hm, something new. He entered the room, treading very softly. At the foot of the bed he paused to admire the strange adornment. Now, what would you call that? A kind of a crown business suspended sort of in space with white net drifting down and forming curtains like on either side of the bed. Pretty. Would you call that a canopy? Gee, Helen got the swellest ideas. He looked about the room. It was the first time in months that he had stepped over the threshold. He remembered the last time. It was when Helen had been ill with pleurisy.

He looked back at the bed with its new ornamentation. He chuckled. It was a good thing that he didn't sleep in that bed any more. He'd look funny as hell snoozing under a bunch of white net. That yellow lamp there in back of the couch was pretty.

He continued to stand in the center of the room thinking idle thoughts as one makes polite and pointless conversation. It seemed he was waiting for something. It came. Helen walked in. She was surprised to see him. Her brows rose in question.

"I was just looking at that," he explained pointing to the bed. "It's pretty."

"Do you like it?"

"Sure. It's swell. I like that lamp in back of the couch, too."

"In back of— Oh, in back of the chaise longue."

"Yeh. Where did you buy that?"

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"It was given to me for my birthday."

"Oh. Well, I guess I'd better be washing up for dinner."

Helen did not reply. She seated herself at the vanity table and began to cold-cream her face with the upward-outward gesture prescribed for ladies past forty who care about their looks.

Hubert went to his own room. It was small but it had three windows and the furniture was comfortable. Helen had attended to the furnishings. He remembered that she had worked very hard to make that room attractive to him. She had been awfully nice about that.

He wondered if he ought to shave. He went to the mirror and turned his cheek to the glass. At the same moment he rubbed his hand over the bristles, thus making it impossible for him to see whether or not he needed a shave. He decided that he could get by another day. Besides it was foolish to shave when there wasn't going to be any company. He guessed he would have to change his shirt. This one was pretty dirty. Well, no, not so dirty at that. He looked in the mirror again. The shirt was all right. What the hell! He'd wash his face and hands and clean his nails and that would be enough. He went down the hall to the bathroom. The door was locked but frequently it stuck and Hubert thought this was one of the times. He turned the knob and forced himself against the door.

Helen's voice, frigid with disdain, came from within. "Would you like an ax?" she asked.

He didn't answer. He went downstairs and washed his hands at the kitchen sink and afterwards dried them

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on the roller towel which hung on the pantry door. He was ready for dinner.

Helen was not down yet. Nellie was holding dinner for her arrival. Hubert strolled into the living-room. His son was still deep in the magazine, having now actually found something of genuine interest.

"Well, my boy—" said Hubert, pleasantly, "how did you spend the day?"

"Not very strenuously," returned his boy, still reading.

"Well, I had a very strenuous day. I sold my business today!"

"Yeh?" asked young Hubert, turning a page and instantly fastening his eyes on the new column of print.

"Yes, I sold my business. I'm through. From now on I'm a gentleman of leisure."

As he spoke Helen came down the stairs, and passing him, flung open the doors between the living- and dining-room.

"Dinner is on the table," she said.

Her husband and son followed her. They took their places at the table, and Hubert, tucking his napkin beneath his chin, demanded, "Did you hear that, Helen? I sold my business."

"I heard several days ago that you were going to," she said.

"Who told you?"

"You did."

"I beg your pardon. I haven't mentioned a thing about it."

"Oh, don't let's argue. From seven until ten one

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night you held forth on what you were going to do when the business was sold. You were going to the South Seas for the fishing, you were going to sleep every day till noon, you were going to dabble a bit in the stock market and buy a couple of automobiles, and just as you began to debate with yourself on the advisability of taking lessons in aviation I fell asleep."

"So did I," added young Hubert.

Hubert Senior said nothing. It really did seem as though he had told them something of his plans. He watched Helen in silence. She was filling the vegetable dishes with creamed carrots. He liked the way she did it. Tidily and swiftly. She was not looking at him. Neither was young Hubert; so he could look at his wife if he chose. She looked pretty good. Her hair was white though. Of course that always made a person look old. He ran his hand contentedly through his own reddish hair. He hadn't a bit of gray and he was a year older than Helen. Funny that she didn't dye her hair. You'd think she would. Silly how she rubbed ice on her face and dieted and went through all kinds of maneuvers to keep looking young and then let her hair get white. Well, it wasn't his business.

Her eyes, gray green and cold like the winter ocean, met his as she offered him a dish of carrots. He took it and said, "Thank you." Helen said nothing. She wanted to speak to him but could think of nothing that would fit the occasion. She knew he was tingling with excitement and full of his own importance. He felt like a great business man tonight and a sudden wave of sympathy made her want to be kind and give him a chance

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to talk about himself. Her eyes lingered on him and she thought how fat he was getting and how careless. His shirt looked as though it had been worn a week and surely that was a three days' growth of beard on his face. His nails were dirty. He used to keep them clean. But that was during their courting days. She had loved his wild, red hair and the fact that he never had a serious moment. He had wanted to play and laugh all the time and she had loved his gay irresponsibility. Ho hum. She had learned later that his gay irresponsibility and desire to eternally play was only a lack of ability to think. He was so stupid, so dull. Even his lies were not entertaining and his humor, Helen had observed, was hugely appreciated by Nellie and the butcher boy. But he had been attractive once and was even now, except for his untidiness, quite pleasant to look at. He had a young face. It was very red but there were laughter wrinkles about the eyes which gave a wholesome, jolly appearance to the face. He looked like a husky, happy peasant. Yes, it was a young face. It occurred to Helen that an incapacity for thought preserved youth better than ice and massage. Halfwits, she recalled, always looked younger than normal people who ponder problems and worry about the future. His eyes were a bright blue and they were looking at her now. She spoke to her husband sweetly, warmly, as though to a child who proudly brings home a toy which he has made with his very own hands.

"How much did you make them give you for the business, Hubert?"

He smiled happily. Here was his moment. Curiosity

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had gotten the better of her highfalutin airs. He'd show her.

"Wouldn't you love to know?" he parried.

Stupid ass! Helen eyed him coldly. "No," she answered. "I wouldn't. I don't care. I was just making conversation because I know you are dying to talk about yourself. Now, you can go talk to Nellie."

"Is that so? Say, there are people a hell of a sight smarter than you who listen to me talk. What's more, you'd never guess what I did get for the business."

Young Hubert laughed. Helen turned away from him. He looked like his father when he laughed. The same wrinkles about the eyes and the same silly, uncontrolled note of hysteria. There was consolation in remembering however that at twenty he was more intelligent and sophisticated than his father was at forty-two. His hair was red but correctly smooth and barbered. Behind his blue, Scott eyes there was a Dietz brain and Helen had learned that it was the brain that mattered.

She carved two more slices off the roast. Hubert passed his empty plate to her and she re-filled it. As she gave him his second helping of mashed potatoes she turned to her son. He was lighting a cigarette. "Don't you want something more?" she asked.

"No. I wasn't hungry tonight."

"No, you weren't. Well, if you're finished—" She rose and moved with a carefully acquired grace into the living-room. Her son followed her. Hubert was left behind with his well-filled plate and the mingled fragrances of his wife's perfume and his son's cigarette.

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Those two sure thought they were the bee's hips. Where did they get off, treating him like that? They were Dietzes all right. The pair of them. Old Man Dietz had always taken a high and mighty air. From the way he had acted any one would have thought that Helen was a queen or something. He was dead now. Hubert was glad of it. Although the old man had had his decent streak of course. He had set his son-in-law up in business and hadn't raised much hell when the business failed. He'd left Helen quite a bit of cash. Hubert never did know just what he had left. It had been plenty though. Helen had staked her husband to a new start. She'd put him up in business again and he'd paid her back every cent. Yes, sir, every cent. He owed her nothing. She'd let him know it if he owed her anything. She was a great one about money. Hubert had heard here and there that Helen had doubled her inheritance by clever investments. Well, she could go to hell. He had money himself. Fifteen thousand dollars he had. That was pretty good, fifteen thousand dollars. Jim Hayden was talking through his hat when he said that Hubert should have gotten twenty-five thousand. Why, the McKay brothers were friends of his. They were good fellows. Brother Elks, in fact. When they offered him fifteen thousand dollars he knew it was a fair price. He took it. Thank God, he still believed that there were square-shooters in this world. He wasn't the kind who thought that everybody was trying to rob him. He was a good fellow, too, same as the McKay brothers.

He finished his dinner and folded his napkin. Nellie came in and began to clear away the plates. At the sight

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of her Hubert experienced an overpowering desire to show somebody just how good a fellow he was. He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a creased and grimy dollar bill. "There you are, Nellie," he said, flinging the dollar bill across the table to her. "Don't spend it all in one place."

He walked to the living-room then and stood at the fireplace staring down at the chunk of cannel coal that threw a satisfactory amount of heat and good cheer. Helen was reading a book. Young Hubert had gone upstairs.

The telephone rang. Helen waited a moment to see if her son would take the call on the extension. The bell rang again and she walked to the phone table in the foyer. Hubert gathered from her conversation that Mrs. Winters was on the wire and that Mrs. Winters and an unknown party were coming to play bridge.

Hubert decided to go out. He had something to celebrate tonight. Hell, what was he going to do here with a bridge game going on? He regarded Mrs. Winters as an intruder. Now where could he go? He felt like doing something exciting. He'd call up Carl Feldman. Carl was a wild bird. He was always talking about the places he went. They sounded like hot places, too. That's what he'd do. He'd call Carl Feldman.

He couldn't call him from here of course. He wouldn't want Helen to hear him making the arrangements. He could go upstairs to call, only she might listen in. Wives were like that.

He put on his coat. Now, should he telephone to the

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taxi office for a cab or should he walk all the way down to the village? Suburbs were awful sometimes. He'd have to get himself a car. A good car. But he'd have to park it in the village anyhow. The house only had a two-car garage and Helen had two cars. A sudden idea struck him.

"Say," he shouted exultantly at Helen.

"Yes?"

"Will you sell me your Packard?"

"No."

"Why not? I'll pay you as much as anybody else would for it."

"But I don't want to sell it."

"You don't need it. You got the Oakland. Oh, go ahead, Helen."

"No, I don't want to sell it."

He frowned at her but she didn't yield. He watched her eyes return to the printed page, yet he lingered. He had a feeling that the last word hadn't been said on the subject.

Presently she looked up at him. "I'll tell you what," she said. "You can take the car. I don't use it much but I like it. I don't want to sell it. Use it as often and as much as you like but don't forget that you don't own it."

"Well, say, I have money."

"Keep it. Use the car if you like but I won't sell it to you."

Hubert wasn't sure whether to say that that was nice of her or not. He suspected some catch in the deal.

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"Why won't you sell it to me?" he asked craftily.

"Because I don't want to. Do be satisfied, Hubert. Take it and use it or don't."

"I'll take it," he sighed.

"All right. There's no jack in the tool chest. Take the one out of the Oakland."

"O.K. Thanks, Helen."

He was just leaving the foyer when the phone rang again. Helen swept past him and answered it. "It's for you," she said unexpectedly.

It was Carl Feldman.

"Say, Scott, I hear you sold your business."

"Yeh."

"To the McKay Brothers, huh?"

"Yeh."

"That's great. I couldn't hardly believe it though. I had to call you up to make sure."

"Yeh, I sold it."

"Tired of working hard, eh?"

"That's right."

"Well, gee, that's great. I couldn't hardly believe it though."

"Yeh, I sold it at two o'clock today."

"To the McKay Brothers, eh?"

"Yeh. I got tired of working hard."

"Ha ha. So you sold the business, eh? Well, that's great. I couldn't hardly believe it though. I had to call you up to make sure. Well, good luck, Scott, I just thought I'd give you a ring."

"Say, Carl, what are you doing tonight?"

"Going out with May."

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"Oh, yeh? Say, where are you going?"

"We're not sure yet."

"You're not, eh? Well, I just thought you weren't doing anything."

"Yeh. Well, I'm going out with May."

"Oh, I see. Well, if you ain't going any place special maybe I could tag along with you."

"May ain't got a girl friend."

"Well, I don't mind. I'll just mooch along."

"Well, you see we mightn't do anything at all much."

"Oh, I don't mind that. Don't worry about me."

"Well, I'll ask May if she can dig up another girl. I'll call you back if she can."

"Oh, don't do that. Say, I'll stop over at your house in about fifteen minutes."

"You can't get here, Scott, without a car. It's a long walk and there's no bus over this way."

"I got a car."

"Oh, have you? Well, I guess then I'll see you in about fifteen minutes. 'Bye, Scott."

"'Bye, old man, see you right away."

Hubert hung up the receiver and turned toward the living-room. His son had come downstairs during the conversation and was industriously setting up the bridge table and arranging ash trays and chairs.

"Funny thing," Hubert announced from the foyer. "A fellow that Carl Feldman and I have known for years has just come in town from Columbus, Ohio, and Carl thinks it would be nice if we three fellows went to a show or something tonight. Maybe we'll have

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something to eat afterwards. You know, a little quiet stag party. I won't be late. 'Night."

"Good night," answered young Hubert and his mother.

Hubert Senior went out the back door to the garage. He was thinking of Carl Feldman and his May. Now that was a nice way to live. Like Carl did. He had a girl who appreciated him and understood him and was always ready for anything. Of course they weren't married, but Carl was good to her. Hubert played with the notion of himself having a girl friend who would be like May only better-looking. Why not? Gee, he wasn't treated right at home and he had money enough to do what he liked. Fifteen thousand dollars was a lot of money. Well, if a nice girl came his way, he'd certainly consider the whole thing. After all, plenty of good fellows were doing the same thing all over the world.

He climbed into the Packard and stepped on the starter.

CHAPTER TWO

"HELLO, hello, oh, for God's sake, Central, I have my party. Get off the line. May, this is Carl. Listen, honey, we can't go to Florence's house tonight. Can you call her up and get out of it?"

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing, but listen, baby, Hubert Scott—you know the fellow I introduced you to that day in the drug store?—well, he's attached himself to us for the evening."

"Oh, for Pete's sake, why didn't you tell him we had a date?"

"It wouldn't have done a bit of good. His mind was made up. Do you think maybe we could bring him down to Florence's with us?"

"Gee, I'd sooner call the date off than do that, Carl. You know Florence don't like strangers."

"Yeh, that's right. Well, you can call it off for to-night, huh?"

"We'll have to, I suppose. Gee, this is going to be a great evening!"

"Oh, Hubert's all right, May. He don't know much, but he's a good sport. He'd give you anything you asked for. He's big-hearted like that."

"But what will we do with him?"

"Well, I was gonna ask you. Can you get another girl, do you think?"

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"Now who could I get?"

"How about your sister?"

"No, I don't know this guy well enough. He might try to make her; then she'd go home yelling to Mama and I'd get killed."

"How about Hazel Schultz?"

"Gee, Carl, your suggestions are great. Hazel Schultz would just be the one to dance with some fat fool, wouldn't she? Can you imagine Hazel with Scott? That's funny, that is."

"Well, maybe she is too high-hat, but then why not ask Muriel Kahn?"

"Carl, she wouldn't come. Muriel isn't the sort to go out with a strange fellow just 'cause I ask her to."

"Jesus, May, you can think of more arguments. You'll have to dance with Scott yourself then once or twice if you won't ask any of your girl friends. I don't like the poor goop to be insulted."

"Oh, wait, Carl, there's a girl who works in the handkerchiefs that I know kind of well. I got her address yet from my Christmas card list. She ain't bad and, see, I don't care enough about her to worry whether he's fresh or dumb or anything. I'll call her up. Her name is Lillian Cory."

CHAPTER THREE

FIVE-THIRTY P.M. in the subway. Lillian Cory standing on the platform of a northbound train holding her elbow at just the right angle for stabbing a swarthy gentleman who had discovered that with every lurch of the train he could fall blissfully against Lillian's soft body. She was tightly wedged between him and a large fur-coated woman. The woman had been shopping. She had many packages and kept announcing that they would be crushed if "people" weren't careful. Lillian knew that she was the "people" to whom the woman had reference. It was clearly indicated that it would be greatly appreciated if Lillian would move closer to the swarthy gentleman.

"To hell with you, Kate," thought Lillian, eyeing the fur-coated woman. "Whatever you're getting crushed there can be replaced. It's different with me."

At Seventy-Second Street the fur coat and the packages left the train. There was a second's breathing-space before the crowds from the local came pushing into the Broadway express. Lillian found herself in the center of the car. Each new passenger had forced her a few steps farther from her original stand on the platform. In her new location Lillian arranged her cape and hat and looked about. Well, at least the swarthy gentleman had been left behind. There was now a fat, pompous fellow at her left holding his fist an inch away from

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her eye as he stood with his *Evening World* widespread. There ought to be a law against reading anything but tabloids in the subway during rush-hour. At her right was an unobtrusive little wisp of a man who was holding to a white enamel loop and chewing gum. Behind her was an elderly gentleman who leaned against her. He meant no harm. He was just resting.

At Ninety-Sixth Street there was a mild flutter in the car. Two ladies got out and four flappers sat down. Nothing occurred that changed Lillian Cory's position. She continued to hang on to her own particular enamel loop. Her hand looked strange and unrelated to her as it grasped the support. It looked small up there and whiter than it looked all day when it was searching through squares of linen, lawn, cambric, and silk for "something with a red border, did you say? But aren't these monograms sweet? Very new. Smart, you see, with just the edge showing above the pocket."

Lillian's eyes roved along the line of advertisements above her head. Gentlemen were invited to change to Reis underwear, wear Paris garters, and suck a Zymole Trokey after the football game. Ladies were charged to remember Pompeian Rouge and Powder brought instant beauty. Taste it, it's Ward's. Chesterfields—they satisfy. Because she likes nice things. It's smart to be thrifty. Maxwell House Coffee—good to the last drop. A skin you love to touch.

The sickening swaying of the train. The strained, yellow lights. The persistent, musty underground odor.

One Hundred and Third Street. Nobody moved. The passengers ignored One Hundred and Third

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Street. Lillian gloomily searched the faces of those lucky enough to be sitting down. She wondered if a fellow would be mean enough to ride past his station just to keep somebody else standing. Thoughts like that come to you during rush-hour in the subway.

A woman began to fuss with the two bushes of hair that showed beneath her hat. Perhaps she was preparing to get out at One Hundred and Tenth Street. If she did, the one standing nearest would get the vacant seat. Lillian nearly upset the little wisp of a man in her rush to get close to the woman who was now examining her face in a pocket mirror. The train drew in to One Hundred and Tenth Street and sped away from it. The woman remained seated and continued to study her face. She was still seated and busily regarding her nails when Lillian left the train at Dyckman Street.

The subway is an elevated at Dyckman Street. Lillian had to walk down to street level. She did it slowly and with a hint of condescension in her bearing. Once out of the subway crush, one can become a lady again.

A few doors off Dyckman Street on Nagel Avenue there was a florist's shop. The window drew Lillian's attention as she crossed the street. Chrysanthemums. Conventional yellows and tawny burnished shades. Lillian suddenly wanted a chrysanthemum. She wasn't particularly fond of flowers, but the chrysanthemums looked smug and expensive. She felt challenged. As though somebody had said, "You couldn't afford those."

Lillian opened her purse and gazed hopefully into the fold where she kept her money. One dollar and

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twelve cents. The chrysanthemums were probably fifty cents apiece. That would be all right.

She opened the door of the florist's shop and walked in.

"I want a chrysanthemum," she said. "One of the reddish ones. How much are they?"

"A dollar."

"All right."

She went out wearing pinned upon the collar of her cape a chrysanthemum. There was more condescension in her bearing now as she walked up Dyckman Street. Girls who passed her gazed admiringly at the flower. It made Lillian chuckle silently. Nobody in the world except herself knew that she only had the chrysanthemum because she hadn't the nerve to retrench when the florist had named its price.

She crossed Post Avenue and continued on her way. At Sherman she paused to look in a milliner's window. Cute hat. Lillian squinted her eyes and examined the stitching around the quill. Cheap-looking. Oh, there was the tag. Three ninety-eight. No wonder. You couldn't get a really good hat under five. Lillian resumed her stroll up Dyckman Street. At Vermilyea Avenue she turned. There was only one way to turn. Like Post Avenue, Vermilyea begins at Dyckman Street.

A few doors from the fire-house Lillian paused and fumbled in her purse for the key. There were children jumping rope directly in front of the entrance of her house. Lillian wondered how she could get through. She wouldn't ask them to move. Lillian was afraid of children. If they became vexed they sometimes shouted

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things at you and made you conspicuous. She continued to sift the contents of her bag through her fingers even after she had found the key. Maybe one of the children would miss and the rope would be quiet while the jumper became a turner.

"Wait a minute. Let the lady pass."

The rope flopped helplessly on the ground and Lillian stepped across it, smiling sunnily at the children as she did so. She wasn't sure which child had pleaded her case, but she was grateful to them all.

In the foyer Lillian replaced the key in her purse and glanced into the third letter box in the lower row. It was marked with a slip of cardboard which bore two names. One was Cory. The other was Friedrich. Lillian herself had printed the names. She had torn the cover off a pack of paper matches and had taken care to print the names plainly. She wondered why she had put Friedrich above Cory.

There was no mail. There rarely was any mail. Of course on the first of the month there was the electric bill. The gas bills were delivered by gas company employees.

As she walked up the stairs Lillian cast disgusted glances at a chewing-gum wrapper, a banana skin, and several nondescript fragments of paper which lay about. Of course the janitress couldn't stand guard in the hall all day long, but still there was certainly some sort of provision that could be made for this sort of thing. The halls really were a disgrace. One would think that Rose Friedrich would have noticed that before renting the apartment.

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Lillian turned the knob of Apartment 3A. Third floor front. The door opened and she walked in. The Friedrich girls were already there. Lillian could hear them talking in the kitchen and the air was heavy with the odor of frying onions. That meant steak. Rose always fried onions to put over it. Lillian didn't like the flavor of onions but she hated to tell Rose that she didn't. There was a long hall off which lay the kitchen and one bedroom. That was Lillian's room. It was on a court. Never bright and not too airy. Facing the street were the living-room and another bedroom. Rose and Sylvia had the nicer bedroom. It was only fair. They did most of the housework, as they could leave later in the morning than she. Lillian looked in the kitchen as she passed. Rose was poking at the onions in the smoke-filled kitchen, and Sylvia was sitting on the table looking over the evening newspaper.

"Lo," called Lillian. "How are all the little Friedrichs?" Her voice was full and mellowly husky. Her mode of speech was nearly always facetious. Earnest moments embarrassed her. When people told her of their troubles, it was only by an effort that she held back light words. She was not unfeeling, but serious conversation made her uncomfortable. It was like the subway crush. People were too close to her, too intimate, when they demanded grave attention and thoughtful replies.

In her room Lillian took off her cape and hat and changed her shoes. Her feet were tired. She sat on the bed and enjoyed her toes' new-found freedom. Her bed was a single bed. Metal with mahogany stain. A

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chest of bird's-eye maple drawers and a wicker chair made up the other furnishings in the room. There was a Crex rug on the floor. Lillian called her room the "lemon box," so the Friedrichs told people she wasn't satisfied with it.

"Hey, Lillian, set the table, will you?"

That was Sylvia calling. It was the least Lillian could do. Setting the table was nothing.

"Yep. Just a minute. I'm giving my feet a vacation."

"Well, they haven't been here a year yet. Don't give them two weeks' vacation."

"All right."

Lillian had closed her door. She always closed the door when she went to her room.

"No kidding, Lillian, come on, will you? What are you doing?"

"Resting my tootsies."

Lillian got up reluctantly. She unpinned the flower from her cape and took it to the kitchen. She found a milk bottle and filled it with water, then after placing the flower in it went to the living-room to open the gate-leg table. Sylvia had already attended to the table. She looked wounded and mournful. Her large black eyes fixed themselves accusingly on Lillian.

"I'm so thin and delicate," Sylvia's expression said. "Don't you think you could spare me this?"

"Have a seat," Lillian invited. "You look too sad to be setting a table. You're liable to cry all over the butter."

Sylvia shook her head. She would help though it killed her. Lillian and Sylvia went about the business

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of bringing plates and knives and forks from the kitchen. Lillian was glad that Rose bought print butter. It came in little quarter-pound pieces and you could put a whole one on a plate. It was a nuisance when you had to slice off a chunk for the table. Lillian opened a can of evaporated milk and poured half of it into a pitcher.

"The steak's done," Rose announced.

"All right. Let's go." Lillian was hungry.

The Friedrich girls conversed mainly between themselves at the table. They had a lingerie and hosiery shop on Washington Heights. A small shop, but it kept them comfortably fixed. Lillian had rented a room in a Washington Heights apartment at one time. A tiny room. She had eaten her meals in a bakery. It had been a static, lonely existence. A frequent customer at the Syl-Rose Shop, she had fallen into the habit of chatting with the Friedrich girls over the purchase of sheer stockings, nude shade, size nine.

They "roomed" too and also found fault with that way of living. Rose had made the proposition to Lillian. She knew where she could get some furniture cheap. If she furnished an apartment would Lillian come live there and pay one-third of the rent and food and electricity and gas? Rose had found the apartment in Inwood. It was only ten minutes' ride to the shop, and the rent was cheap. Sixty dollars for four rooms. Lillian didn't buy her stockings at the Syl-Rose Shop any more. The Friedrich girls always wanted to sell them to her at cost.

"Listen, Sylvia, when you go back to the shop tonight watch that box of gun-metal dollar-eighty-nines.

KEPT WOMAN

They're all defective. Don't give them to any steady customers."

"I won't. Don't worry."

Rose was the elder Friedrich. She gave the orders. She was a round-faced, stockily built girl with thick black brows. Sylvia was very thin but quite pretty. She wore her hair carefully waved and kept her nails brilliantly coated with deep-rose nail liquid. She had a boy friend. Rose had none.

Between five-thirty and seven the Syl-Rose Shop was in the hands of a sixteen-year-old cousin of the Friedrichs. It didn't matter so much. That was the slow part of the day. At seven each evening one Friedrich girl returned for two hours. It was Sylvia's chance tonight. Rose was remembering that Max would meet Sylvia and bring her home. Nobody ever brought Rose home on her working nights. The thought of Max suggested kindred subjects. Rose turned to Lillian.

"Who gave you your pretty flower?" she asked.

"I ketched him up at the flower-man's all by myself," said Lillian.

"Huh?" Sylvia stared at Lillian. "At a dollar a throw *P'm* not buying them myself."

"Oh, do you think a dollar is a lot for a large chrysanthemum?" Lillian's eyes said plainly that they were surprised. "Have you ever heard of chrysanthemums for less?"

"Sure I have." Sylvia pushed back her plate and left the room. There was more she wanted to say on the subject, but that could be done at a later date. She was pressed for time at the moment.

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Lillian and Rose cleared the table and began their dish-washing. Sylvia went out after charging Rose not to worry about her. She and Max might go on somewhere after the store was closed.

"No getting in at two in the morning, now," Rose ordered.

"How about three?" asked Sylvia. She shut the door before Rose could answer her.

Rose laughed a little. "Young girls are cute, aren't they?" she said to Lillian. "Especially when they're in love for the first time. They're so fresh and sure of themselves."

"Is Sylvia so terribly young?" Lillian asked.

"She's twenty-two."

"Oh," said Lillian. She was twenty-three.

Rose washed the pots and pans while Lillian was putting the dishes back in the cupboard. There was a silence between them for more than five minutes.

Then Rose said, "I'm going to the movies, I think. The Inwood has Milton Sills tonight. I like him."

"Going out for a wild time, huh? Don't get hurt."

Rose had intended to ask Lillian to go with her, but she changed her mind now. Lillian evidently looked upon the movies as a dull way to pass an evening. Rose ran the dish-cloth over the tub where the dishes had drained and hung it to dry on the edge of the sink.

"Finished?" asked Lillian

"Yes, we're finished." Lillian pulled the cord on the light and they left the kitchen. Rose went to the living-room, where she picked up the newspaper and became instantly engrossed in the daily true story. Lillian went

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to her own room. She liked it best in the evening. There was a yellow shade on her light and it gave the room a soft, warm radiance and transformed the slightly soiled, white net curtain into a golden mesh. Lillian went through her bureau, searching for handkerchiefs, stockings, and underwear that needed attention. This would be a good night to wash.

The telephone jangled irritably. It belonged to the house and was operated from a switchboard in the janitor's apartment. The bell had the same whining, put-upon tone as the janitress's voice. Rose answered it.

"It's for you, Lillian," she said, rattling the knob of Lillian's door.

"For me? My God, I'm popular. That's the second call within a month."

Lillian went to the phone. She supposed that it was Louise Casey or Anna Leitz. Both of them half-hour talkers, and just when she wanted to get her washing done, too.

"Hello."

"Hello, Lillian?"

"Yes. Who is it?"

"This is May."

"Who?"

"May. May McCloud."

"Oh, yes. How are you?"

"I'm fine. How are you?"

"Able to take nourishment. Say, I'm sorry I didn't recognize your voice. I don't know why I didn't."

"Oh, that's nothing. Say, Lillian, what are you doing tonight?"

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"Nothing in particular. Why?"

"Well, Carl has a very dear friend who wants to go out with us tonight and we think it would be nicer for him if there was another girl beside me in the party. I know a lot of girls I could ask, but I don't want to ask just any one. He's a peach of a fellow and I'm asking you because, really, I think it's mean to pick just any kind of a girl for a man. Even if it is only for the evening. I want him to have somebody nice. You know how it is, Lillian."

"Yeh."

"Can you come?"

"I guess so. Where are you going?"

"We have no plans. Why?"

"Nothing. I just asked. Well, you can pick me up here, can't you?"

"Sure. Around nine."

"All right."

Lillian hung up the receiver and started back to her room.

"Going out, Lillian?" Rose called.

"Yessum. Want anything?"

"No. I was just asking out of plain curiosity."

Lillian opened her closet door and stood leaning against the jamb gazing drearily at what she saw. Two hangers on the clothes-arm. One held a velvet dress. It had been a good dress, but it was worn now. Badly worn. Lillian yanked the other hanger down. There was a suit upon it. Could she wear the suit? Too cold out. How about the suit with the cape over it? Funny-looking.

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Lillian began pulling garments off the hooks and regarding them carefully. A silk dress. Torn in the sleeves. A tricotine. Stained beyond all imagining. A skirt. What could anybody do with a skirt? A nightgown. A coat from which Lillian had ripped the fur collar. Now where was the dress she had used that collar for? Maybe that—oh, there it was. No, that was stained, too. That was the dress she had worn to Louise Casey's birthday party and Billy Fisher had dropped his salad in her lap.

Lillian looked down at the dress she was wearing. It was after all the best she had. And why not? It was less than a week old. She'd wear that.

Lillian never used cold cream. Just had never gotten in the habit of it. She went to the bathroom and washed her face in hot water and then in cold. She squeezed a blackhead and put a drop of peroxide upon it. She sighed as she remembered that she would have to put on the tight shoes again. It wasn't so much that they were tight. They really were her size. But the short vamp was so uncomfortable. Oh, well.

She went back to her room and changed her stockings. A change of stockings is always soothing to hot, tired feet. She really would have to do some washing tomorrow night. This was her last clean pair. The shoes now. Maybe they were too small. Jesus, how they hurt. Worse now than all through the day.

Lillian fussed quite a bit with her hair. It was beautiful hair. Dark, warm red with a wide, rolling natural wave. It was bobbed. Billy Fisher had cut it one night when everybody was drunk. Lillian had awakened the

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next morning amazed and grief-stricken. She had had to go at once to the hairdresser's to have it evened. The hairdresser had assured Lillian that the bob was becoming; so it had remained short for over a year now. There had been a time though when Lillian had said, "What! Cut my hair? I should say not. It's the only first-class feature God gave me."

Lillian always used a great deal of make-up. It went on thick now. Pink cheeks, red lips, black brows and lashes. There was little of the real Lillian Cory left when she was finished. A mask surmounted by a crown of gorgeous hair, and that so perfect that it too looked unreal. She leaned across the bureau to look closely at herself in the mirror. Her short upper lip kept her mouth perpetually parted and her teeth showing. They were good teeth. Strong and white. Her nose was too small for beauty but it was straight, and the tiny nose conspired with extremely large gray eyes to give an elfin quality, a whimsical expression to the face of Lillian Cory.

She opened a diminutive bottle of Coty's L'Origan and laid the glass stopper first against one ear lobe and then against the other. Her hat was a black felt with green roses worked upon it in worsted. She pulled it down over her full head of hair. It covered her brows, and the narrow peak of the hat gave a faint military smartness to the outline of her head.

She drew her cape over her shoulders. It was black broadcloth and there was a collar of so-called fox. It looked well and didn't shed. Lillian asked no more than that of a fur collar.

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She went to the kitchen and rescued her chrysanthemum from the milk bottle. She pinned it upon her collar. On the left side. Then slowly she walked to the living-room.

Rose had straightened the room and rearranged her hair. She had the center light switched off and was trying to read the paper by the light that filtered through the floor lamp's pink shade.

"No movies?" asked Lillian.

"Oh, I changed my mind."

Lillian got a Camel out of the cigarette box that was standing now on the gate-leg table. The box was disturbed only at meal-times and then with reluctance. It had cost nine dollars wholesale. Max had given it to Sylvia when the apartment was furnished. Lillian lit the cigarette and stood smoking thoughtfully. She did not enjoy the tobacco. After one puff it already tasted of lipstick. She knew why Rose had not gone to the movies. Rose wanted to see who was coming for her. Lillian preferred it otherwise. It gave her a sense of power to know that the Friedrichs were completely unaware of her life and actions outside that apartment. A sight of Lillian's friends would give Rose a foundation to build her guesswork upon. Lillian wanted a cloak of mystery drawn close about her activities. It made her feel important.

And here was Rose ready to play hostess to May and Carl and the other man. Staying home from the movies to see them. To see what they were like.

A car stopped in front of the house. Lillian looked out the window. She saw May McCloud.

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"Well, good night, Rose," Lillian said, crushing out her cigarette. "I hope Milton Sills didn't miss you."

"Why don't you let your friends come up and get you?" asked Rose.

"Why should they bother you?"

"Oh, they wouldn't bother me."

"Apple sauce. See you tomorrow."

Lillian ran down the hall and out of the apartment. Rose sat for a minute in the pink lamplight. She felt cheated and annoyed. She looked out of the window in time to see a Packard glide away from her front door. Then she got up and went to Lillian's room. She wanted to see if Lillian had taken a nightgown.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE road to City Island leads through Fordham, past the Bronx Zoo, and on out through dark, tree-lined silences. Carl Feldman had suggested a ride, and this one in particular because he was well known in one of the roadhouses along the way and they could get a drink. He sat with May in the back seat. Her hat was off and she lay with her head against Carl's shoulder. She spoke rarely, only breaking her silence to say, "Don't."

Lillian was beside Hubert Scott. He paid little attention to her because he was driving, and Hubert Scott took his driving seriously. When it was necessary for him to get somewhere in a great hurry he would occasionally do thirty miles, but it had to be on the open road.

"Say, Hubert, we're blocking traffic," Carl remarked. "What's the matter?"

"We ain't going to a fire, Carl. What's the use of hurrying? I always figure that it's best to take it easy and live longer."

"What's the use of you living long? The way you drive you won't get many places if you live to be a thousand."

"Don't be razzing me. I'll get you there safe."

Carl said no more. There was no use. Hubert Scott

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didn't believe that any car would do over forty miles an hour and he wasn't sure that even that could be accomplished; he'd never tried. It was too dangerous.

"What kind of a car is this?" Lillian asked. She couldn't tell by looking at it. She was unacquainted with the insignia and distinctive features that marked the different makes.

"This is a Packard, little girl," responded Hubert.

Lillian did know that a Packard wasn't in the same social class with a Chevrolet or a Ford. She looked at Hubert with a new respect.

"Pretty swell," she breathed.

"Oh, it's a good boat," he responded carelessly. "I've never had a bit of trouble with it."

Carl and May were lighting cigarettes. "Want one, Lillian?" Carl asked.

"Yes, please."

Carl lit it for her and passed it over. He sat back then and began to talk to May in a low tone.

"Pull down that shade, will you, Carl?" Hubert requested. "The lights from those cars back there flash on my mirror and darn near blind me."

Carl pulled down the little shade over the back window. Lillian wondered how a person could drive comfortably without knowing if anything was in back. Hubert must be a pretty good driver. She was short of conversational material; so perhaps that would be a good line to work on.

"You drive beautifully," she said. "But I suppose you know that."

"Well, I don't know," he admitted modestly. "I've

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had a lot of people tell me that I was the only one they could ever drive with and feel comfortable. But I say it's only common sense and keeping your eyes open. You know Joseph L. Heidingsfelder, the millionaire?"

No, Lillian didn't.

"Well, I mean, you've seen his name in the papers?"

Lillian hadn't. "Oh, yes," she said, "I've seen his name in the papers."

"Well, he's been a friend of the family's for years. He's an old fellow now. He's a card. Funny as the devil. Only last week he says to me, 'Hubert, I wish you would come over and take me for a ride some day. Here I am with a string of eleven cars and I never get a ride.' I says, 'Well, Joseph L.'—I always call him Joseph L.—'why don't you get a good chauffeur?' And he says, 'They're all too reckless. I'm spoiled after driving with you.'"

"I'm spoiled too," said Carl. "I've got bunions on my can from sitting so long. No fooling, Hubert, May's nervous from the way you're poking along."

"She'd better be nervous than dead," Hubert replied, solemnly. "Look at all the collisions you read about in the papers. No careful drivers ever get into them."

"Say, don't kid yourself that you're careful, big boy. You're too slow to be careful. You know crawling on a motor road is as dangerous as speeding."

"Well, I don't crawl. When you're not going any place in particular twenty miles is plenty."

"Oh, don't bother about it," said May. "We'll get there in time."

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"There" was a large white frame house. The veranda was gay with red and blue bulbs and a huge sign on the lawn announced that they had Mal Gobel's Joy Boys playing music within. Also chicken and waffles at two-fifty per plate.

Carl stretched while Hubert locked the car. May put her hat on and Lillian leaned over and pulled up her stockings. Round garters were always letting your stockings slip and wrinkle.

The Joy Boys were actually there. Five slim, bored-looking young men playing for one lone couple who did not even justify the Joy Boys' existence by dancing in time to their music. Besides the dancing couple there was a party of three at a table by the window. The management had optimistically crowded the place with tables; so there was plenty to choose from. Carl fancied a table by the orchestra stand. Hubert would have liked to sit overlooking the veranda where he could watch the car, but Carl had a flair for getting his way.

A waiter appeared. Carl eyed him with disfavor. "Where's Johnnie?" he asked.

"Johnnie's not here any more. Bought himself a place on the Lincoln Highway. Can I do anything for you?"

"I don't know. We'd like a drink."

"Sure thing. What's it going to be?"

"I'd like a ginger-ale highball," said Carl and looked questioningly at the others.

"Me too," said Hubert.

"Could I get an old-fashioned?" asked May. "I'd like that."

The waiter nodded.

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"I'll take one," said Lillian.

The waiter departed. The four at the table sat gloomily silent. There didn't seem to be anything that anybody wanted to say. After a minute of drumming his fingers thoughtfully on the table Carl spoke.

"You can always have a good time if you know the right places to go," he said. "Now a stranger in town would never find a place like this."

"That's right," Hubert agreed.

"Still, if you know a place like this and can make friends in it," Carl went on, "you're all right. See, I can get a drink here any time at all. Come to think of it, prohibition is a joke, ain't it?"

He addressed his question to Lillian. She was on her mettle. May's boy friend was asking her a serious question. Now was the moment to say something smart and scathing of the Eighteenth Amendment.

"Yeh, it's a joke all right," she said after a moment's thought.

"Damn right, it's a joke," Carl snapped at her as though she had been responsible for prohibition and after months of argument he had forced her to admit its failure.

"I don't know what's funny about it," said May. "If it's a joke it ought to be funny. Before prohibition my old man used to spend half of his pay in the corner saloon on a Saturday night and come home cock-eyed to my old lady. Now liquor is so expensive and so damn lousy that he spends *all* his pay for it and my old lady has to have the doctor in every Sunday morning for him."

KEPT WOMAN

Hubert laughed. "That's a good one," he said, appreciatively.

May glared at him. "You wouldn't think it was so good," she said, "if you had to put up with him."

"Yeh," Carl mourned, "prohibition is rotten."

The waiter brought the drinks and distributed them. May grasped hers swiftly and firmly. Her small hands fluttered excitedly about the business of stirring the drink. She was ready for another before Lillian had half finished.

"Hey, don't be such a tank, kid," Carl protested. "You'll be running your old man a race for first honors."

"That's foolish," she said, "and you know it. I only drink to be sociable. I don't even like the God-damned stuff. I never drank till I went out with you and I only started then because I didn't want to be a wet blanket. Me a tank, no less! I couldn't be. I don't like liquor. I could stop drinking right now, only everybody else drinks, so I don't see no sense in me stopping."

Lillian's eyes rested wonderingly on May. That flare-up had been very unreasonable, she thought. Surely Carl's little joke didn't call for all that.

The waiter was at the table again.

"Another round," said Carl.

"Not for me," May told the waiter.

"Aw, come on, May," Hubert soothed her. "Carl was only fooling."

May sulked and Carl said nothing.

"One old-fashioned and two highballs," the waiter droned and started away.

KEPT WOMAN

"Wait," May called. She turned to Carl. "I'll take another," she said, "if you'll promise not to call me a tank again."

"I'll promise nothing," said Carl. "I don't care if you don't take another."

"All right then. I'll have another for spite."

The waiter smiled and went away.

Mal Gobel's Joy Boys were at it again. They were playing the reckless, lovable song from the season's hit show, Charlot's Revue.

"A cup of coffee, a sandwich and you,
A cozy corner, a table for two—"

Something magnificent and breathless about the lyric. A realness, a beauty. No song ever written sets its period more deftly. The lunch-room with its yellow lights, its white-aproned waiter, its marble table tops. The city outside, the newsboys shouting the morning papers at midnight, the honking taxi horns. The boy and girl smiling serenely and happily into each other's eyes across their orders of fried egg sandwiches and coffee.

"I don't need music, lobster or wine,
When your lips are pressed close to mine."

"Want to dance?" Carl asked May.

She answered him by standing up and holding her arms awkwardly toward him. They glided out upon the vacant floor. Hubert and Lillian watched them for a while, then turned to each other.

"I don't dance," he confessed.

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"I think it's a waste of time myself," she returned promptly.

"Well, I don't know about that."

"Maybe I am wrongish."

"But still—"

"Yeh, but still—"

They looked at each other and Lillian burst out laughing. Lillian always made it a practice to laugh when there threatened to be a lull in the conversation. That is, of course, a conversation for two. Silence would make her appear dumb and unable to think of anything to say; so she laughed, and the laughter gave her a superior position. It always worked out so.

"What are you laughing at?" Hubert asked.

"Oh, nothing," she replied with an effort.

"What's so funny? Let me in on it."

"Oh, I can't." A handkerchief leaped to her hand from some unlikely spot, and wiping her eyes, she made a brave attempt to control herself. It proved no use. She was off again in a moment.

Hubert became uncomfortable. What was she laughing at? What had he said or done? "Say, what's the joke?"

"Oh, I can't tell you." The handkerchief flew to her eyes again. She tried once more to control her merriment. This time she was successful. She breathed a faint, weak "Oh, dear" and regained a polite and quiet demeanor. It had worked. She had now convinced him that she knew all sorts of amusing things which she couldn't possibly share with an outsider. And too, there still persisted a sneaking notion that perhaps she had

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been laughing at him. Hubert felt very unimportant and outside the know.

"Drink up," he commanded in an effort to prove that he really was somebody.

"Oh, sooner or later. Not just now. I'll get tight and start throwing things."

"Is that what you do when you drink too much?"

"Sure."

"Well, I don't mind. I'm strong enough to stop you or I'll pay for anything you break. How's that?"

"That's fine." She was laughing again. Not uproariously as before, but enough to alarm Hubert.

"Say," he said, hoping to curb her laughter. "What's your name? I didn't get it when May said it."

"Lillian Cory."

"Great. I'll call you Lil."

"I can't say that I care for that. It sounds kind of saloonish."

"Do you think so? My mother's name was Lily and everybody called her Lil."

"Guess I made a social error."

"Oh, no," he insisted generously. "I'm not like that. I always say that a guy that's sensitive has a guilty conscience."

"Well, I'm sensitive."

"You are not."

"Honest, I'm terribly sensitive. The least thing hurts my feelings."

She was joking. He could tell by the way she smiled at him that she didn't mean it.

"You're a great little kidder, aren't you?"

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"Me? I should say not."

"I like you."

"That's nice. I like you too."

"Do you work?"

"No, I just stand around a department store eight hours a day."

"Which store?"

"The same one that May works in."

"Oh. Can I meet you tomorrow night and take you to dinner?"

"I should say not."

"Why not?"

"Oh, there are reasons."

"What are they?"

"I can't think of any, but there must be some."

"I'll be outside the employees' entrance at closing time."

"I won't hold my breath till you come."

"Honest, I'll be there."

"Will you really?" Lillian's voice was mockingly entreating.

"Sure I will," he replied; then he saw that she was kidding him again. "That is, if I don't see a girl I like better," he added.

"Oh, if you don't come I'll sicken and die of relief."

"I'll be there," he said briskly. His tone said, "Come now, let's be serious."

But Lillian was laughing again and Carl and May were coming back to the table.

"Let's have something to eat," May suggested as she sat down.

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"Not here," Carl objected. "The food's rotten."

"Well, where will we go, Carl? I'm game for anything." Two drinks always had made Hubert game for anything.

Everybody fell silent. That was a problem. Where would they go for something to eat?

"How about Arras Inn?" said Lillian.

"Why Arras Inn?" May had to be sold the idea.

"Because nobody else seems to have thought of a place and Arras Inn is in my neighborhood and I can duck right home after I'm fed."

"All right," said May. "That's fair enough."

Carl called for the check and he and Hubert fell to wrangling pleasantly over it.

"This is my party."

"The hell you say."

"You can pay next time."

"You pay next time."

"His money's no good, waiter."

"Hey, look, I got the right amount here. You'll have to break a twenty."

"All right. I'll pay down at Arras Inn." Hubert retired only after the waiter had marched away with Carl's money. He felt cheated. What's the use of having fifteen thousand dollars if some other guy is going to pay for your drinks?

They filed out of the roadhouse. Mal Gobel's Joy Boys looked very cross at their departure. The Joy Boys' lives were lonely ones.

The ride back to Inwood was the same as the one to the roadhouse. Except that May didn't say "Don't."

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Hubert drove at twenty miles an hour and Lillian smoked and thought what she would order at Arras Inn. Lobster for choice. But suppose they didn't have lobster? A club sandwich, maybe. Or a chicken salad.

"Are you hungry?" Hubert asked her.

"Sort of."

"Well, when you get to that place you picked out, I want you to order anything you like. Anything at all now. Don't pay any attention to the prices."

"What makes you think I would?"

"Oh, I can tell your kind. You're the backward type."

"Hubert is reading her palm," Carl said.

"He's good at it, too," May whispered. "She's very backward. Not up to tenth year intelligence yet."

"Sh. She'll hear you."

"That would be awful, wouldn't it?"

Arras Inn was on Broadway, a few doors off Two Hundred and Seventh Street. It was a long, narrow place with latticed walls and colored lamp shades. There was music, singing, and once or twice a fire to vary the monotony.

There was lobster. Everybody ordered lobster. Little talking was done as the party chewed small, thin claws and delved hopefully into large, fat claws. Hubert had mayonnaise all over his mouth. Lillian didn't think it very becoming. She wanted to tell him to use his napkin, but she was afraid it would make him angry. She kept her eyes resolutely turned away from him.

The waiter came and carried away the shells. Lillian ventured a look at Hubert. There was still some mayonnaise down in the corner of his mouth. Lillian

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felt that she could be sick. She had eaten too much mayonnaise herself to be left wholly untouched by the sight of some smeared on the corner of a person's mouth. May came to the rescue.

"Big boy," she said, "wipe your mouth and if your nose needs blowing for God's sake blow it before it starts to show."

Hubert wiped his mouth.

Everybody lit cigarettes.

"I have to go home," Lillian said, "as soon as I finish this."

"Mother waiting up?" Hubert asked.

"Sure, my grandmother too."

Hubert congratulated himself. He was getting to understand her. He could tell that that time she wasn't joking. Her eyes had been perfectly serious. She did have a mother and a grandmother with whom she lived.

"I'll take you home as soon as you're ready," he said.

"We'll wait here," said May. "You can come back and pick us up."

"Now there's no sense to that," Carl protested. "We can just as well go when Lillian goes. She only lives around the corner. You'll only have another minute to linger here and what do you want to linger for anyhow?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"Just to make a little extra trouble. Come on. Lillian's ready to go now."

"All right." May got into her coat sulkily.

The waiter brought the check and Hubert paid it,

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choosing to break a hitherto unrevealed fifty-dollar bill in preference to the twenty which he had allowed them all to gaze upon at the roadhouse.

Lillian wished that Carl and May had decided to stay at Arras Inn while Hubert took her home. She wanted to see if he would mention anything more about meeting her the following day. She felt sure that he wouldn't speak of it in front of the others. And he didn't.

"Good night," Lillian said as she climbed out of the Packard.

"Good night," each of the others responded. Nobody added a single extra word.

It was all very gloomy.

"He won't be there tomorrow evening," Lillian said to herself.

But he was.

CHAPTER FIVE

"COME on, sit down, you don't have to go yet. Rose and Sylvia won't be home till twelve. On Saturday nights they both work till after eleven-thirty in the store. Don't worry, Hubert, I'm not anxious to have them catch me in a kimono entertaining a man. They'd put me out or call a cop or something. But it isn't nine-thirty yet. That's right, have a seat.

"Oh, I know what you're sulky about. You're still glooping over that snapshot on my bureau, aren't you? I told you who it was. I ought to throw it away, I guess, but I'm kind of soft about it. You know, love's young dream stuff. Gee, I was nuts about him and him married and me a kid sixteen years old. He was nice. No, honest, he didn't know I was only sixteen. I lied to him and told him I was nineteen. He wouldn't have took a chance otherwise. That's a State's prison offense.

"I guess he liked me all right. He had a store. A haberdashery it was. I use to play hooky from school and spend the afternoon in there talking to him. Of course he didn't know I was still a school kid. I use to steal nickels out of my mother's pocketbook to get carfare to go to him, and on days when her pocketbook wasn't handy I use to walk twenty-two blocks to see him. I was a dodo all right. We would go in the little room in back of his shop and we'd pet. For a long time it wasn't anything more than that. I guess the fear that

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a customer would come in always kept us from going further.

"Then one night—gee, I'll never forget it. It was a hot summer's night and, you know, the stars were all out and you could smell the flowers and green things and it was kind of romantic. I went out for a walk with my girl friend. Her name was Julia—Julia Hart. It was about nine o'clock and I'd just left her and was walking home when who should I see in an automobile but him. He was all alone and he asks me if I want to take a little ride. I says sure and we take a ride. Well, the God-damned stars and the flowers was too much for us. We should 'a' stuck to the little room in back of the store.

"I went home scared to death. I didn't know much. I thought maybe I'd have a baby before the night was over. I cried and my mother comes in and asks me what's the matter. I wouldn't tell her and she went back to her room thinking, I suppose, that I'd had a fight with Julia or that I'd seen some jane with a prettier dress than I had. But the next day she could see there was something serious wrong with me. I couldn't eat and I bawled and I wouldn't talk decent to my kid brothers and then of course she wanted to know what was biting me.

"She comes to my room after the kids are gone to school and she's got all the work done and she suspects pretty much because she says, 'Lillian, I want to hear what you've done. You're my little girl and anything you've done is my trouble as well as yours.' She says it

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as nice as pie and I like a God-damn fool tells her everything except the boy friend's name.

"Then you should have heard her. She had a nice way of talking but I wasn't her little girl any more then. Once she had her curiosity satisfied she was herself again. I was a little bum and a lot of other things. I was surprised. I was only a kid, you know. I thought mothers always loved and forgave their children. But that's bunk. That's only greeting-card stuff. Cripes, didn't you ever notice how much store a childless woman sets by a dog? There you are. A woman's got so much love to dish out and a dog will do as well as a child. That will give you some idea of the high quality of love a kid actually gets. What? Oh, well, I suppose there are exceptions.

"Anyhow, the old lady tries to get Father O'Day to come talk to me about my downfall. He was a nice old fellow and he says no, he won't force himself on my bewildered young soul. Nice words, ain't they? That's what he told her. I heard her tell my old man. Father O'Day says that if she'll leave me in peace that I'd come to him myself in time. But her leave me in peace? Don't be a clown. She goes to my favorite teacher in school and tells her about it and asks her to come point out to me the error of my ways. As though I was going out with some man every night. Well, anyhow, little by little, the old lady has everybody in the neighborhood wise to what I did.

"So just before I was seventeen I left them all flat. I told my old lady to go to hell and I cleared out.

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'You'll get your punishment,' she screams at me from the front window as I walk down the street and, mind you, all the neighbors listening. I felt like saying, 'I got all I could stand when I found out what you were really like,' but I just kept walking.

"No, I didn't go to the boy friend. I'd heard his wife just had a new baby and I thought maybe he had troubles enough without a homeless girl busting in on him. I'd never seen him since that night and I ain't seen him yet. He was nice though.

"Well, anyhow, I didn't have a baby. That was something to be thankful for. I got a job right away in a plumber's store. You know, answering the phone when the plumber was out and taking down all the addresses of all the leaking toilets in town. I saw his ad in the paper and he took me right on and advanced me half a week's salary, which was five berries. I got a room with it. Three dollars a week for the room. Some room. I was there a couple of months and then of course I started to look around for something better. I wanted a better job and a better room.

"I tried the telephone company but I didn't like it much. Too many people telling you what to do. Then I got a job in a movie theater as cashier. That was all right. Gee, this is like an old-fashioned melodrama, ain't it? The wronged girl leaves home and tries to make her way in the brutal world. Only it wasn't so awfully brutal. I met Vincent in the movie theater. He was the film operator. He rushed me like mad. I liked him. I thought he wanted to marry me. That wasn't his idea at all. Well, I wouldn't say it wasn't his

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idea. He wanted everything but the marriage. He had a big room in a kind of careless rooming-house. They let him cook in the room and bring women up to cook for him or do any other little thing they were in the mood for. One day he asked me up and I went. He pulls the old question and—God strike me dead if this is a lie—I fell for him because I was ashamed to let him think that I was fool enough to imagine he'd asked me up there for anything else. Sure, I'd sooner let him think that I came up there hard-boiled and willing than that he should know me for a dumb kid who'd make a scene about protecting her honor. So there you are. Strike two. What the hell, says I, why should I let a moving-picture operator think I'm a dumb kid?

"I never liked him much after that. I could hardly look at him. I suppose that's because he told the door-man that I was easy. I left that job because of him. I wanted to go to work in the stores anyhow. The hours were normal and I thought I'd get to know some girls. You see, I hadn't any friends at all. Here's a laugh. They asked me in the first store if I was acquainted with any special stock and I says, 'Sure, haberdashery.'

"Well, anyhow I drifted around and finally got in the store where I am now. I got a swell room on Washington Heights. The only thing though, I was kind of lonely around mealtimes. Eating in bakeries and restaurants alone is no fun, so I came here with the Friedrichs. I don't like it much though because I think they don't like me. I'm funny that way. I can't be comfortable if I feel I'm making somebody else uncomfortable.

"I got friends though. Anna Leitz works in the

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handkerchiefs with me. I see her often in the evenings. And Louise Casey use to work in the store but she don't now. I see her a lot though. She's engaged to be married to a fellow named Billy Fisher. I go to parties up at Louise's house and I chase around with her crowd some. I haven't had a boy friend—that is a serious case—in some time.

"There was Walter. He was nice. He was a clerk in a cigar store. I went with him for nearly a year. He was married and his wife was an invalid. You know, wheel-chair and all that. She couldn't have no kids of course and Walter was just crazy for kids. He'd asked me to go with him for a week-end, you know, somewhere, but I says to myself that I'll be respectable now. Then one night he tells me that he ain't just after me for low purposes, that he's really only trying to win me over because he thought maybe I'd have a child for him. Oh, it was real sad the way he tells about how he loves kids and his wife can't have them and all that. I guess I must have had my hair waved that day and was feeling reckless or something, so I says, 'Walter, you see me through and support the kid and I'll do it.' You see, I liked him and I knew what it was, having nothing to go home to in the evenings, and I felt that my life was a washout to me, so it might as well be some use to somebody else.

"Well, I'm strong and healthy. I got in the well-known condition and the boy friend gives me seventy-five dollars for an operation and fades out. Slick, eh? That's a line what is a line. Well, I kind of lost faith in men after that. Maybe I wouldn't have lost faith

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only it was tough laying sick in a furnished room with no one to so much as get me a drink of water. Cripes, I even had to come home alone from the doctor's. Cry? No, I didn't cry. I thought maybe the landlady would hear me.

"That's my story, Judge. There's my whole history up to tonight. The haberdasher, Vincent, Walter, and now you. Gee, fifteen minutes without a cigarette. Got a match?"

CHAPTER SIX

BY ELEVEN-THIRTY the neighbors across the court were already hollering for quiet; so the party was a success. Billy Fisher was hollering back at them. Billy was quite a wit. He admitted that he was, but at this stage of the party he could think of nothing to shout across the court except the old reliable "Go to hell." The neighbors declined to go. They threatened him with the janitor, the police, and a dispossession. Billy retorted, "Go to hell." And because you have only to establish yourself as a wit in order to put the stamp of humor upon all or any of your remarks, Billy's friends howled with delight every time he shouted.

It was the Saturday night party at Billy's house. As a matter of fact these parties occurred not more than once a month, but since they always burst forth on Saturday they were known as the Saturday night parties. Those who attended always liked to pretend that regular as clockwork there was a party at Billy's every Saturday night.

Hymie Moss brought the gin. Hymie Moss always brought the gin. Billy would take it from him at the doorway and say, "What did you do that for?" Hymie would say, "I don't know, I just thought—" But both of them knew that Hymie brought the gin because he wanted to be invited the next time.

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Everybody got plastered as soon as possible. That was the way you had a good time. Louise Casey was having a very good time. She was about to be ill any moment. She sat in a corner of the sofa wondering whether she ought to go and have it over with right away or wait till there was no choice in the matter. In one hand she held a cigarette and in the other a glass of gin mixed with Nedick's orange juice. Louise was going to marry Billy. His mother, who had arranged that they should all live together, knew that they were going to be married; so she made no comments when she found Louise's handkerchiefs under Billy's pillow.

Anna Leitz and her Fred danced past Louise and she stuck her foot out and tripped them. They fell. Everybody laughed except Anna. She was never one to take an affront lightly. She belonged to the class who always want explanations.

"You looked so pleased with yourself and so sure you were the last word in grace that I just had to trip you." Louise knew Anna's weakness for explanations.

"You would," said Anna coldly. She frowned at the carpet and made a great to-do about dusting the back of her dress. Then swiftly putting on the ecstatic, rapt expression that she used when dancing, Anna offered her arms again to Fred.

Over on the wing-chair Mary Jackson was telling Lillian Cory all about how she felt. Mary was going to have a baby. Almost any minute. Lillian had drawn her chair up close not because she wanted to listen but because Mary had told her to. Hubert was listening, too. He had a great respect for women who were "that

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way." He hadn't let Billy miss Mary on a single round of drinks. "After all," thought Hubert, "where would we all be if it wasn't for women like Mary Jackson?"

"Oh, dear," Mary wailed, "I wish George would come and take me home. He ought to remember that in my condition I should be in bed early."

Hubert offered to take her home. He reminded her that he had a Packard right outside, but Mary said she'd better wait for George, thanks just the same.

Hymie's wife, Theresa, sat on a chair in the foyer. It was a small foyer and it looked right into the living-room. She could see and be seen from there, but she could not be bumped into nor be addressed above the blare of the radio. Some people were of the opinion that she had chosen that chair for a reason.

Theresa was a creamy-skinned brunette who never spoke unless she had something unpleasant to say, and she had the unforgivable knack of always being right. She had a reputation for never feeling liquor, but actually she felt it as much as the others. With every drink she slid deeper into despondency. She thought of death and insanity in her drunken moments and so sat silent and afraid while her companions laughed and danced. Because her intoxication did not manifest itself in hilarity they thought her cold sober, and when they spoke to her they took her dreary remarks on death and destruction as further proofs of her sobriety.

Billy had begun to sing. He was a paint salesman and had all the Long Island territory. He made out pretty well, but his friends were convinced that he should have been an actor. His singing was great, and

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he danced as well as Pat Rooney. Even better, some people thought. Besides he always knew a lot of funny jokes. Sometimes he could hardly tell them for laughing. He read *Judge* and *College Humor*, went to two vaudeville shows a week, listened in to the Happiness Boys and carried a copy of *Variety* in the subway trains.

“Dinah, is there any one finah
In the state of Carolinah—”

As he sang it occurred to Billy that there wasn't a single soul in show business who could boast of singing like Al Jolson and dancing like Pat Rooney. And here he was all tied up in the Long Island territory. On the second chorus he decided that he'd show what a break he'd given Eddie Leonard by staying out of the business.

“Di-wa-wah-nah, in the state of
Caroli-wah-wah-nah—”

Everybody applauded enthusiastically except Louise. She was in the bathroom being very, very ill.

“Something she et, no doubt,” Mary Jackson said.

Everybody wanted Billy to sing again, but he had to go help Louise. Anna and her Fred were sitting on the floor under the lamp. They were petting. Nobody paid any attention to them because if they weren't dancing they were always petting.

Billy could be heard yelling at Louise. “You haven't got the sense you were born with. You have a sieve instead of a brain.”

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Hymie got an inspiration. "Hey, Louise," he called, "Louise, tell him you can't help what you're like. Your mind was made by God and your body by Fisher. How's that for a wisecrack?"

"Lousy," returned Billy from the white-tiled regions.

Anna drew away from Fred and surveyed Hymie with distaste. "Some people can't have a good time," she remarked, "unless they're being vulgar."

"Well, we do sympathize with you," Hymie said. "That's a terrible affliction, but you're welcome here just the same."

Louise came staggering through the living-room, bedroom bound. Billy had his hand on her shoulder, steering her between chairs and doorways. She was very white and kept moaning, "Oh, I'm so sick. I'm so sick."

"Well, don't die till I get you to the bed," Billy said, cruelly.

Lillian Cory and Theresa followed to the bedroom. There persists a silly notion that you can be of service to a person who is ill from drinking too much. Billy gave Louise a push and she fell on the bed and lay supine and unconcerned about the further success of the party.

Theresa and Lillian stood looking at their friend for a moment; then they turned and looked at each other.

"Well," said Theresa, "your Hubert seems to be having a great time."

"Yes," said Lillian. "He likes the crowd. He is awfully nice. He gave me this." She exhibited her finger, upon which gleamed a ring set with several tiny diamonds and four strips of sapphire.

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"And the hat," Theresa reminded her.

Lillian laughed pleasantly. "Yes, he bought the hat," she said.

Theresa sighed and nodded with the air of one whose worst suspicions have been confirmed. "Pretty soon he'll buy you a coat," she said, "and you'll think you're set for life. Don't be a damn fool, Lillian; stick to your job."

"Oh, I am."

"Yes, so far. But, listen to me, stick to it always."

"I could always get one as good as the one I got," Lillian pointed out. "That is, if anything should come up and I'd quit."

"Yes, you always could, but you wouldn't. A girl gets out of the habit of getting up early in the morning. Take my advice, I won't be here much longer to give it to you."

"Why not?"

"I'll be dead or in an insane asylum. You'll see."

"Don't talk like that."

"It's true. I won't last much longer."

"Banana oil."

"You'll see," Theresa repeated.

She walked to Louise's vanity table and meditatively daubed powder on her nose. There was a faint scent of a Colgate perfume haunting the room. Lillian looked around. She had always liked Louise's bedroom. Billy had painted the furniture buttercup yellow (number nine), and there were yellow voile curtains at the window. No rug, but what did anybody need a rug for?

"I'd like a room like this," Lillian said.

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Theresa said nothing. She said nothing very eloquently. Lillian instantly knew that Theresa didn't regard this as much of a room.

"Of course I mean with a rug and a few other changes," Lillian hastily added. She hadn't meant that at all. The room looked perfect to her the way it was.

"It only has one window," Theresa said, "and it's too small. I don't like painted furniture either."

"Oh, don't you? Well, I don't know, I always thought it was cute, but I suppose it gets on your nerves after a time."

"Louise hasn't any nerves," said Theresa. She started out of the bedroom and Lillian followed her. After all, they had done all they could for Louise.

Outside they found Billy getting ready to go to the delicatessen store for sandwiches. Hubert was going with him. Hymie was insisting that he should go instead of Hubert. Hubert was shouting above the radio music that he could drive Billy to the store as he had a Packard right outside.

Billy and Hubert finally went.

"I ought to have gone," Hymie protested.

"Well, couldn't you have gone with them?" Theresa asked.

A light broke over Hymie's face, and reaching for his hat, he rushed toward the door. But it was too late. Crestfallen, Hymie returned to the party just in time to hear WEAf sign off for the night. He switched off the set and put a record on the Victrola.

Fred and Anna danced.

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Billy and Hubert brought ham and cheese combinations back, also coleslaw, pickles, and a coffee ring.

"Cripes, didn't anybody make coffee?" Billy asked.

"There probably isn't any," said Theresa.

There wasn't; so they had tea. Louise came weakly from the bedroom to have a cup of coffee. They gave her tea, and she took it uncomplainingly. She also took a sandwich, a few pickles, and a slice of cake. Then she was ill again.

"Say, Billy," said Hubert, "why don't you and Louise go somewhere with us Sunday? I mean a week from tomorrow."

"All right, sure. That is, if she ain't dead. If she is I'll go anyhow."

"I'll leave it up to you and her where we'll go," said Hubert. "I like you two."

He looked around the table to see if there was anybody else he liked. His eyes rested for a moment on Mary Jackson but he rejected her because of her condition. He didn't even look at Hymie and Theresa. Theresa was too much of a killjoy. Fred wasn't much, but Anna seemed a sweet kid.

"Say," Hubert asked her. "How would you like to go along?"

"Depends on where you go," she answered cautiously. "I've no swell clothes like Louise has."

Hubert reached into his pocket and drew out his wallet. He threw twenty dollars on the table before Anna. "There," he said, "get yourself a pretty dress."

The others stared goggle-eyed at the scene. Cripes,

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twenty dollars just like nothing. Anna refused the money with a cold, hurt air. It was all a girl could do with people watching her.

"Put it away, Hubert," said Lillian. "Nobody wants your money."

"Oh, Scotty, I have no pretty suit to wear when you take me bye-byes," Billy wailed.

Hubert threw the wallet to him. "There you are," he said. "Get yourself and Louise something swell. No kidding, go ahead."

Billy tossed the wallet back. "God, how it hurts to do that."

"And you're not fooling," added Theresa.

Hubert replaced the wallet, trying to look as though he couldn't hear Billy telling Hymie that there was a hundred and fifty dollars in it. No kidding. Billy had seen it in the delicatessen store. Hubert had wanted to pay, but of course Billy wouldn't let him. Hymie doubted the latter statement.

Fred got up, cranked the Victrola, and put another record on. Billy and Hymie started to move the gate-leg table back so that Fred and Anna could dance. One leg of the table unexpectedly turned in and three cups and saucers, several handfuls of coleslaw, four pickles, and a pitcher half full of condensed milk fell on the floor.

"How's that for a quick turnover?" asked Billy. He always asked that when something upset.

"Got a mop?" asked Theresa.

"Yea, Theresa, it's out by the ice-box."

"Well, you'd better get it," she said.

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Mrs. Fisher came in while Billy was trying to cover the entire living-room floor with the condensed milk. The mop was old and there hadn't been much milk spilled, but he was doing his best to get a bit of it in every isolated spot and corner.

"Billy, Billy, what in God's name are you trying to do?"

He didn't answer. He just surrendered the mop. Mrs. Fisher had been visiting her sister in Jersey City, and as she mopped she told the assembled company how her sister suffered with rheumatism and rush of blood to the head.

Nobody had noticed how late it was till now. There was a sudden dash for coats and hats. Louise was lying on them and had to be aroused. She leaned against the wall smiling whitely as everybody assured her that they had a wonderful time. Theresa paused in the act of putting her coat on. She took a step nearer to Louise and stared at her.

"You look very bad," she said. "Be careful. You look awful."

Louise managed to get to the vanity-table mirror. She looked at herself with interest. She was a brunette. Some people remembered when she had had a neutral brown shade of hair. It was black now, jet-black, and gave a heavy coarseness to a face which could poorly stand any added coarsening. She had gray eyes and a large mouth which she painted orange. There was a hard enameled prettiness about Louise like that of the poster ladies who advertise cigars. She wore hoop earrings and always had the latest thing in five-dollar shoes.

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She withdrew from the mirror and touched Theresa on the arm.

"What do you mean, I look awful?" she asked challengingly.

"You look sick."

"Are you sure you meant that?"

"Yes, why?"

"Well, there's been a lot of remarks passed here tonight that I didn't like the sound of. I heard Anna say that I was tough-looking."

Anna fixed surprised eyes on Louise. "I did not say that."

"You did so. When you and Fred were sitting under the lamp on the floor there."

"Oh, Louise, take it up tomorrow," Lillian said. "It's too late now."

"Well, she did say it, Lillian, I heard her."

"I did not."

"I'll leave it to Theresa. She's sober. Theresa, didn't Anna say—"

"I didn't hear her," said Theresa.

"That's the kind of a friend I figured you for," Louise said, scornfully.

"Well, I can't help it if I didn't hear it," Theresa protested.

The men, with hats in hand, stood in the doorway waiting for the girls to finish. Anna was crying and reciting some wrong which Louise had done her a year ago Washington's Birthday.

"You can all go to hell," Louise said.

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"Now, now," Billy intervened. "You're all drunk. Say good night and forget it."

"Come on, Anna," Fred called. Anna went.

"She'd better marry Billy and be decent," Anna remarked as she passed through the hall.

"Now how would marrying Billy make anybody decent?" asked Theresa.

Both Billy and Louise waved to the party from the window.

"Go on, Anna, wave," said Fred.

"I will not."

"Go ahead. She didn't mean anything by what she said. You got to expect a little fight at a party. None of them go off without somebody getting sore at something."

Anna saw that he was right and she waved.

"But I didn't say that about her," Anna announced. "I did say that her black hair made her look a little hard. But, gee—"

They all stood looking up at Billy and Louise. The crowd wouldn't disperse till their hosts left the window, and Billy and Louise wouldn't leave till the crowd dispersed. Deadlock.

Lillian went over to the car. "Who's going our way?" she asked. She tried the door. It was locked. "Open it, Hubert," she said.

The others looked at her wonderingly. Funny that they'd never paid much attention to Lillian Cory in all the months they had known her. And here she was in command of a Packard. They'd never even considered themselves her particular friends. She was a peach of

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a girl, too. Strange they hadn't noticed before how nice she was.

Louise leaned out the window and called to her, "I'm sorry for spoiling the party, Lillian."

"Cold fish," returned Lillian. That meant Louise was acquitted of any guilt.

"See you Sunday," Billy shouted.

"Posilutely."

Great scout, Lillian.

Peach of a fellow, too, that Hubert. He was going to take them all home, regardless of where they lived. They piled in, Anna on Fred's lap, Mary Jackson beside them, Hymie next to Mary, and Theresa and Lillian in front with Hubert.

"My George never did come for me," Mary moaned. "I guess he was too tired when he got through work."

"Where do you live?" Hubert asked her.

"Up in Woodlawn."

"Holy smokes," said Hubert. "How did you get here?"

Everybody laughed.

"Let's see, now," Hubert considered. "This is the Bronx, isn't it?"

"East a Hundred and Forty-Fourth Street," everybody said, helpfully.

"Where do you live, Theresa?"

"Broadway at a Hundred and Ninety-Second Street."

"Well, that's easy. That's near Lillian. How about you, Anna?"

"Two Hundred and Thirty-Eighth Street. Fred lives down on a Hundred and Third. West side."

KEPT WOMAN

"Any of you live in Hartford, Connecticut?" Hubert asked. "Well, let's go."

"Where first?" asked Lillian.

"We'll get rid of Fred," Hubert said, determinedly.

Hymie lit a cigarette. "Mind if I throw ashes on the floor, Hubert?" he asked.

Hubert laughed. "I don't care what you do," he said. Then after a moment of thoughtful silence he added, "Of course, I mean, within reason. Be careful of the upholstery, will you, Hymie?"

"Sure."

"Don't do anything in Hubert's Packard, darling, that you wouldn't do in our Essex," said Theresa.

"Oh, you got a car? Why didn't you come over in it tonight?" asked Hubert, innocently.

Theresa laughed. "Well, you see, we knew that Mary lives in Woodlawn and Fred on a Hundred and Third Street."

Hubert could have saved Mary till the last and dropped her off on his way home, but he wanted a few minutes alone with Lillian. He delivered Fred and then the Mosses to their homes and Lillian stayed in the car as they drove through Inwood and up to Anna's house and thence to Woodlawn. They started back to Inwood then. Hubert was happy. He sang as they came across Fordham.

"Dinah, is there any one finer
In the state of—"

He broke off to remark, "Billy's a clever kid, isn't he?"

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"Isn't he great? I get a million laughs out of him."

"Yeh, he's funny all right. He ought to 'a' gone on the stage."

"That's what everybody thinks. He'd 'a' been a riot. What do you think of the rest of the gang?"

"All right. That Anna's a nice kid. I'm not crazy about her boy friend, but I suppose he's O.K. That Theresa sure can sock liquor away without feeling it, can't she?"

"Sure. I've seen her drink all the men in a party right under the table. I think she's got something wrong with her that none of the rest of us know anything about. She always talks about dying soon."

"Yeh? Gee, that's too bad. She ought to get a good examination. I got a swell doctor I could send her to. If she ever talks about it again you can tell her to ask me. He's a very clever fellow. My brother was dying, mind you, dying, and I talked his wife into letting my doctor take a look at him. 'It can't do no harm,' I says to her. So she says to me, 'All right, Hubert, call your doctor. If it was anybody but you I would say no, but you pretty nearly always are right.' So I call this fellow and up he comes. He takes a look at the medicine that the other doctors had given him and he doesn't say a word. Just breaks every bottle and then he gives my brother some new stuff. In two days my brother is back on the job."

"Gee, that's wonderful. And he never was sick after that, huh?"

"Well, a couple of months afterwards he got sick again and that time he died."

KEPT WOMAN

"Oh."

They had stopped before Lillian's house. She opened the door of the car. Hubert shut off the motor and followed her into the foyer of the building. It was very quiet. Nearly every one had returned from their Saturday night revels and according to custom all lights but one had been extinguished.

"Well, thanks for taking me over to Fishers'," said Lillian. "I hope you had a good time."

"Oh, gee, I did. A swell time. They're a great gang all right. But don't go up yet, Lillian."

He took her hand and squeezed it. She laughed a little forced laugh. "All right," she said. "What shall we talk about?"

"Must we talk?" He pulled her close to him and kissed her. He kissed wetly. Lillian rubbed her handkerchief over her lips.

Hubert surveyed her in the light of the lone bulb and thought her beautiful. The average man will meet a woman who attracts him and he will be filled with a desire to reserve her time and favors for himself. Hubert had been filled with a desire to reserve some woman's time and favors for himself and then he had met Lillian Cory. He believed that Lillian's fatal beauty had lured him from the path of honor. He did not remember that he had craved to be led into a little light sin an hour before meeting her. He would not have believed that any willing lady whom May McCloud had picked that evening would be wearing that two-hundred-and-forty-dollar ring now.

"God, you're sweet, Lillian."

KEPT WOMAN

"Well, what would you like to do about it?"

"Have you all for my own."

"Your wife would never give you up."

"Oh, I know she wouldn't. That's out of the question. You don't know Helen."

"Who are you arguing with? I said she wouldn't give you up."

"I wish she would, but she's the type who wouldn't. I didn't mean that. I meant something else."

"What for instance?"

"I mean this. Let me get you a little apartment somewhere. You could give up your job and we could be together nearly all the time. I have plenty of money."

"Now, now, don't be a villain offering the poor little girl all modern conveniences with running hot and cold water."

"I mean it, Lillian. How about it? I'd get you any apartment you wanted and you could pick all the furnishings. I'd get you swell clothes, too. I'm not stingy. Gee, didn't you see how I was willing to even give a strange girl twenty dollars tonight? I'd even get you a little car of your own. What do you say, Lillian?"

"Sure," she said, but she was laughing.

"No, I mean it, Lillian. Quit your laughing. Gee, it isn't as though you were taking some terrible step. You know what I mean. It isn't as though you and I— You know what I mean."

"Yeh, well, it's like this. I don't think I can do it."

"Why not?"

"Well, you see I agreed to come with the Friedrichs and share expenses. They need me to go one-third on

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everything, see? It wouldn't be right to leave them to take the whole rent and everything and they'd be left with a room more than they need and they'd have to pay for it."

"They could rent it."

"Maybe they'd get somebody and maybe they wouldn't. Besides they mightn't like to have somebody they didn't know at all."

"How would this be? Suppose you give them one-third of the rent for the rest of the lease's run?"

"No, I don't think they'd take it if I wasn't getting what I was paying for. They're not like that."

"Well, do you mean you're going to throw me over and give up all I offered you so that you can help those damn girls?"

"If I stayed with them wouldn't you take me by-byes no more?"

"Sure, but you beat the Dutch, Lil. I don't understand you. Say, you could have a little car of your own."

"I heard you the first time."

"Well, gee, you are funny."

"Maybe it's because I'm so sleepys. Let me go up now. Will I see you tomorrow?"

"Sure."

"Good night."

"Give me a kiss, will you?"

"A small one."

"Don't you love me?"

"With all my heart and soul and then some." She was laughing again.

"Good night."

KEPT WOMAN

"Good night. See you tomorrow."

She climbed the stairs wearily. She was tired. Men had a knack for bringing up new troublesome ideas just when a girl was tired. These halls were dirty. It would be nice to pick a brand-new apartment of her very own. There were at least a dozen new buildings in Inwood. Clean halls, stippled walls. Oh, well, she had practically promised the Friedrichs that she'd one-third on everything. It wouldn't be fair to quit them.

She opened the door quietly. Sylvia and Rose were always in bed when she came home. Tonight was an exception. Lillian saw the light in the living-room as she stepped across the threshold.

"Hello," she said.

The girls answered her, but she went to her room and took off her hat and cape, preferring not to join them.

Rose came to the door and knocked. "Can I come in, Lillian?"

"Come ahead."

Rose was wearing a bright yellow satin kimono with large red roses scattered upon it. Sylvia was at her heels, clad in pongee pajamas.

"We mightn't get a chance to talk in the morning," Rose began. "We're going out early with some friends. So we waited up for you. It's terribly late, so if I speak quickly and get it over with I hope you won't mind."

Lillian looked at her wonderingly. "Fire away," she said.

"Well, it's like this. Maybe you've noticed the new apartments that have been going up? Well, Sylvia and

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I looked at some. They're beautiful. Bracket lights on the walls and fountains in the court and all kinds of things. I—we have been doing a very good business down at the shop and we can afford to live in a better place than this. We know of course that you're making the same salary as before and you, of course, couldn't manage the higher rent. Would you be sore if we called this little arrangement off?"

"We asked the landlord about the lease," Sylvia took up the story, "and he says it's all right to move. He was very nice about it. We didn't tell him, of course, that we were moving to a better house. I told him that I was going to be married right away and that Rose and you couldn't afford the rent alone."

Lillian sat on the bed listening to them talk. Occasionally she nodded understandingly and once she smiled.

"The apartment we took," Rose went on, "is awfully cute. It—"

"Oh, you took it already," said Lillian.

"Yes, we figured that you'd be moving to a furnished room again and you can always get one without any trouble or planning. You must come see us, Lillian."

"Thanks, I will. When do we do the busting up?"

"By next Thursday we have to be out."

"Easy."

"I hope you're not unhappy about it, Lillian," Rose said.

"No, it's all right."

"Where will you go?" Sylvia asked.

"Oh, I don't know."

KEPT WOMAN

"Both Sylvia and I are sorry, Lillian, but when Sylvia is married perhaps you could share the apartment with me. That is, if you're making enough money by then."

"Oh, thanks, Rose. That gives me something to work for and look forward to."

The Friedrichs looked swiftly to see if Lillian was making light of Rose's offer. It would be the time of times to take offense.

It would make them feel so much happier with their wall brackets and court fountains if Lillian would prove unpleasant.

But Lillian had her back to them. They could not see her face. She was taking off her dress. Other nights she put it on a hanger, but tonight it slid to the floor and she left it there.

"That won't be fit to wear," remarked Rose.

"Plenty more where that came from," Lillian said cheerfully. She was wriggling into her nightgown now.

"Did you set your alarm?" asked Sylvia.

"Tomorrow's Sunday," Lillian said. "And the day after that will be Sunday, too. And the next day will be Sunday. Didn't you know, Friedrichs, it's going to be Sunday from now on?"

The Friedrichs withdrew feeling very righteous. Clearly Lillian was drunk. They owed it to themselves to sever connections with a girl of that caliber.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LILLIAN took Louise apartment-hunting with her. To take a girl friend along when transacting any sort of business is a well-known and highly efficient means of killing two birds with one stone. The renting agent mentions the price of the apartment and you say, "Well, of course, that doesn't matter so long as I like the place." That impresses the girl friend. The girl friend remarks that it is pretty far from the subway and you say, "That doesn't matter as we don't have to go downtown in the mornings, and besides we'll have the cars." That impresses the renting agent.

Also when a girl friend is with you, you are not afraid of the renting agent. You have nerve enough to ask if there is plenty of heat and hot water and if the halls and stairs are well kept. You wouldn't dare ask that if you were alone. The girl friend gives you confidence in your own importance, for ever since you showed your utter indifference to the rent she has been regarding you with respect.

Lillian selected an apartment. It was in Inwood because it hadn't occurred to Lillian that one would look anywhere else. It was a nice apartment. Three rooms. Seventy-five dollars. Louise thought it was an outrageous price and said so. Lillian said she didn't think it was much.

KEPT WOMAN

"But, look," Louise protested, "you and the Friedrichs had four rooms for sixty."

"Yes, but that was a terrible place."

"It wasn't bad."

"No, it was worse."

Lillian stood looking over her new home. Of course it's hard to judge an empty place, but any one could see that this would make up great. The living-room was square. It had two windows, two wall brackets, two outlets, and a ceiling light. Not a hanging chandelier. This place was swell. The fixture was brass and it occurred to Lillian you could put orange bulbs in it. The windows looked out on a garden court. Trees and fountains and everything. Gee, pretty.

She walked to the bedroom. It was large. Twelve feet if it was an inch. You could put the bed there, right by the windows. These windows looked out on the court, too. Even Theresa would say this was a lovely room when Lillian got through with it. The bathroom was right next door. Dandy shower. And everything so nice and sparkling white. Gee, a built-in medicine chest. Pretty snappy-looking. Of course, kitchens were just kitchens. But this one seemed a little out of the ordinary. You could see the street from its window and the gas stove was white. Lillian wasn't sure that a white gas stove was practical. Well, time would tell.

There was plenty of closet space. Two small closets and one huge one. A nice, large foyer and the whole place stippled in cream color. A peach of a place.

"And your name?" asked the renting agent.

KEPT WOMAN

"Cory. Mrs. Hubert Cory."

"All right, Mrs. Cory. I'll give you a receipt for the deposit right away. Now, what day will you be coming in?"

"As soon as I can get my furniture. You see, I'm buying everything new for the apartment. I'll go shopping tomorrow and let you know what day they can get the stuff in and that day I'll be in."

"All right, Mrs. Cory. Thank you."

Lillian and Louise left the building. They walked slowly through the court, as Lillian wanted to admire the trees and shrubs.

"They seem to be nicely kept," she remarked to Louise. "I hate them when they get all wild-looking, don't you?"

"Yes, they look terrible then. This place is sure classy-looking, Lillian. I'll bet you'll have nice neighbors here. See, the rent is so high it'll keep out the riff-raff."

"Gee, I wish it wasn't Sunday. I feel like going down to buy my furniture."

"Where'll you get it?"

"I don't know yet."

"You going to get it on time?"

"No. That's a nuisance. You always have to remember to stay home to pay the collector and all that. I couldn't be annoyed. Can you go with me to get the stuff?"

"Gee, I don't know. I ought to go to work."

"Oh, the hell with work."

"All right. I'll go with you."

KEPT WOMAN

Lillian hailed a taxi. She and Louise had to join Billy and Hubert back at One Hundred and Forty-Fourth Street. Hubert had preferred staying with Billy to looking for an apartment. He and Lillian hadn't really intended to see Billy and Louise till the following Sunday, but when Lillian told Hubert that she was taking him up on his offer that had changed everything.

Billy still felt the effects of the night before, but, outside of the fact that she didn't feel like eating, Louise was completely recovered. She and Lillian had to tell the men all about the apartment. Mrs. Fisher was present; so they pretended that Hubert's interest was of the most impersonal sort. Mrs. Fisher permitted them to play their little game.

The evening was not eventful. The four had dinner in an Italian restaurant in Fordham and afterwards went to Keith's. Hubert drove Billy and Louise home. They had a few drinks upstairs, then separated for the night, Louise promising faithfully to be ready when Lillian came for her next day.

"Aren't you going to work tomorrow, no fooling?" Billy asked Louise.

"No. Let them dock me for a day. I gotta help Lillian furnish her apartment, don't I?"

Billy turned to Lillian. "And what about you? Ain't you ever going back again?"

"Nope."

"Don't they owe you for a couple of days?"

"Oh, I should carry my hips down there for a few days' pay. I can't be annoyed."

"Jees, you dames are independent. What are we

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going to do with them, Scotty, if we can't make them work for us?"

Hubert laughed. "I guess we'll have to support them, Billy."

"The joke's on you. I'm broke."

Lillian got Hubert to stop at a newsstand and buy all the Sunday papers that remained at this late hour. She sat up in bed till three o'clock reading the furniture ads. The Friedrich sisters could hear her rattling the papers and they wondered.

"Maybe she's looking for a furnished room," Rose whispered.

"I don't know," Sylvia returned. "I have a feeling that she's pulling a fast one."

Louise was ready when Lillian came for her next day. They started out at once. Lillian knew now just where she wanted to go for her furniture. The girls sat back in the taxi smoking and talking.

"Gee, it feels funny not to be at work," Louise said.

"It feels great."

"Yeh, but I'll be back tomorrow."

"Oh, go on. I can't get my shopping all done in one day. You'll have to help me. I'll make good what you lose at the office."

"I wouldn't let you do that."

"Don't be silly."

"Gee, you are wonderful, Lillian. I never knew anybody as decent as you are about things."

"Well, I need you with me."

"What for? I'm no use. You have better taste than I have."

KEPT WOMAN

"Now never mind." Lillian didn't want to tell Louise that she needed her mainly to testify to the fact that the furniture was purchased on a strictly cash basis.

On Third Avenue a few blocks below One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street the furniture was selected. Bedroom suite. It was mahogany. The man said so. One hundred and forty-nine dollars. It had little flowers painted on it. One little flower for each piece of furniture. Lillian could have had a suite for one hundred and twenty-two dollars and fifty cents. But as she said to Louise, "Why be cheap?"

Lillian didn't want a rug for the bedroom because the floors in the new apartment were beautiful and besides Louise's room looked lovely without one. But Theresa would look at the room and say nothing if it didn't have a rug, and Anna would think it was because Lillian couldn't afford one.

She bought a rug. Sixty bucks. Good rugs cost like the devil but you've got something for your money when you get a good one. She bought a lamp with a pink georgette shade, a chair with a pink satin covering, a large Maxfield Parrish print, and the bedroom was finished except of course for curtains and knick-knacks. Oh, yes, a pink bed-light, please. The large one with the glass fringe. Yes, that one.

The living-room now. Lillian almost hated to start on the living-room. It takes so much to furnish one. A person doesn't realize until they go to do it.

Well, one of those three-piece suites. Couch and two chairs. That one with the tapestry was cute. But brown. Oh, in red also? That is cute. Oh, for heaven's sakes.

KEPT WOMAN

It opens and makes a bed. Well, that's a good idea. Many a time Billy and Louise would be staying. And those chairs were comfortable. A hundred and ninety-eight dollars for the three pieces. A couple of straight-back chairs, too. Windsor chairs, Lillian supposed they were called. Yes, they'd do. Two of them. Ash-receiver stands. Oh, that one. The wooden one painted like a little colored fellow in uniform was cute. Was the ash tray in his hands detachable? Oh, of course. How stupid. Well, that and another one. That plain one would be all right. A gate-leg table. Seat eight? Eight what? Oh, go on. Six would have a hard time getting around it. Now, that was something like it. All right. Sure, a rug. Eighty-five dollars! Good God. But it *was* pretty. Those flowers-pots in it were almost the same shade as the upholstery on the furniture. Two lamps, please. A bridge and the other kind. Piano? Gosh, no, there's nobody who plays. Oh, piano *lamp*? Of course. How dumb. Oh, look at that cute thing to put ornaments in. What? Oh, it's a bookcase? Well, for heaven's sake. Isn't it large? Positively huge. No, I get them from the circulating library. A table and two chairs for the kitchen, please. White? Certainly. Oh, really. Well, let me see them in green. Well, isn't that cute? With green linoleum and all, that will be adorable. My God, what next? Colored tables and chairs for the kitchen. I'll be darned. Oh, a few pictures for the living-room. That one of the girl on the balcony is sweet. That one and the one with the bunch of trees on it. Oh, dishes, too. Do you have them here? Well, they'll have them uptown. What? Oh, don't the spring and mattress come

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with the bed? Well, just send a soft one and two soft pillows. Pink ticking, please. Well, it would be silly to pay it all today. Maybe the firm wouldn't deliver promptly once they had the money. Half now. How would that be? The other half to be paid on delivery.

Lillian opened her bag and drew out five clean, rustling hundred-dollar bills. Louise stared and the furniture salesman tried not to.

"What does half amount to?" Lillian asked him.

He retreated to a corner, and leaning against an up-standing rolled rug, began his calculations. It took him some time, but when he returned he was able to speak with authority.

"Half will be three hundred and twenty-one dollars and seventy-five cents, Madame."

"That's half, is it?" asked Lillian. She eyed with disdain her five crisp bills. "A man is crazy," she said, "to think you can furnish an apartment on five hundred dollars." She handed four bills to the salesman, who scurried away with them lest she change her mind.

"And you haven't got curtains or dishes or knives and forks yet," Louise remarked. "And kitchen things. You know, egg-beaters and things like that."

"Oh, it'll cost him easily a thousand dollars to furnish the kind of home I want," Lillian said.

Her change arrived and the girls were bowed obsequiously from the store. The salesman thanked Lillian profusely. She was the first cash customer the store had had since 1909.

"Oh, I'm exhausted," Lillian said. She wasn't at all. She felt exhilarated and excited. Fancy being able to

KEPT WOMAN

spend that much money in a few hours. She felt tall and haughty. She wished that she had remembered to wear gloves.

"I feel lost without my gloves," she said to Louise. "I'll have to get a pair. Let's go in here."

A young lady with a very white face and a very brown neck asked if Lillian wished something in chamoisette. A dollar ninety-eight. Best quality. Sells for three dollars, would you believe it, downtown.

"Have you something better?"

"Better? There's nothing better than a Stein and Goldfogel Chamoisette."

"I wanted kid."

"Oh, kid. Black? White?"

Lillian reflected. "White."

"Here. Four and a half, regular price. Take them for four dollars."

"That's too much," said Louise.

That was all Lillian needed to hear. "Why, that's reasonable, Louise. I'll take two pairs. And a pair for my friend here. What size do you wear, Lou?"

"Now, don't be silly. Why should you buy me gloves? Six and a quarter I wear. But, please, don't be like that, Lillian. I'll be mad at you."

The girls fitted on their new gloves in the taxicab.

"What will Hubert say when he hears how much money you've spent? And these gloves for me. I'll bet he'll be mad."

"He'd better not be."

Louise's glance was one of deepest admiration. If she

KEPT WOMAN

had a man with money she'd be scared stiff to make him sore. But, gee, Lillian was independent.

"I've got to see about the telephone and gas and electricity," said Lillian, "but I guess Hubert will do that. He ought to do something. Here I've had all the trouble of shopping. Oh, gee, I nearly forgot. I got to buy a wedding ring."

"Now?"

"No, I'll wait till tomorrow. I guess I can get it in Inwood. I want one of those white gold ones with orange blossoms."

"I got mine in Woolworth's," said Louise. "It's nice to have, you know, if we go like down to Asbury over the week-end."

"Yeh, I'd get one in Woolworth's too if I was like you. Billy will give you a real one some day but that's out in my case; so I'm going to get the white gold one now."

"Do you care?"

"Care about what?"

"That Hubert can't marry you? Are you crazy about him?"

Pressing close. People were never satisfied unless they were asking questions. They had to press close to you and try to look inside of you. If they stood at a distance and watched they'd find out more. Words were nothing.

"Well, what do you think?"

"I think you're crazy about him."

"Then that's all settled. You won't have to ask again."

KEPT WOMAN

"Not giving you a short answer," added Louise.

Lillian laughed. She and Louise were getting to be better friends, she thought. There was a time when Louise would have gotten sore at her for answering so snappy.

They met Billy and Hubert at the Italian restaurant. Later they all took a ride in the Packard because there was nothing else to do. Hubert brought some gin along to make the ride pleasant. It was decided that Louise would stay home another day and help Lillian get curtains and kitchen essentials.

"Do you have to work tomorrow, Billy?" Hubert asked.

"Sure."

"Gee, that's too bad. I ought to have somebody to keep me company while Lillian's out shopping. Oh, take a day off and we'll go to a matinee or something."

"Gosh, I couldn't, Scotty."

"Why not? Let me know what the day would cost you and I'll make it good."

"Well, I'll let you know. You give me a ring about nine tomorrow. How's that?"

When Hubert and Lillian were alone that night in the foyer of her house she said, "Hubert, it's going to cost a lot for the apartment. Do you mind?"

"You know I don't."

"Well, gee, there's so much I didn't figure. It'll be around a thousand dollars with linoleum and all."

"What do I care?"

"Don't you honestly?"

"No. I want you to have everything you want."

KEPT WOMAN

"You're good, Hubert. Listen, I bought Louise a pair of gloves for four dollars today. Do you care? She's staying home from work, you know, to help me."

"Sure. Get her what you like. She's a good kid. Say, you'll need more money tomorrow. Here's another two hundred dollars I drew for you."

Lillian dropped it into her bag.

"I got you something else, too. I didn't want to give it to you till we were alone."

He handed her a little box. A jeweler's box. She opened it and saw a wedding ring sitting in its white velvet groove. A white gold ring with orange blossoms upon it.

"Gee, our tastes are alike," she said. "It's just what I wanted."

She slipped it upon her finger. It fitted and a sense of security came over her as she turned it about on her finger.

"I feel married," she said. It was very quiet in the little hall. She wished that Billy was there to make a wisecrack or that a troop of flappers would come down the stairs. You feel kind of silly when it's all very quiet and somebody has done something nice and for the first time in your life you have the sensation of being cared for and anchored.

She turned the ring again on her finger.

"It's got initials inside," Hubert said. "It says H. to L. and it says the date."

"Does it? Gee, that's great. Well, got to go up now."

"Give me a little kiss?"

"What for?"

KEPT WOMAN

"I like kisses."

"Oh, apple sauce. See you tomorrow."

She ran up the stairs then. If she stayed he might tell her that he loved her—and then where would she be?

CHAPTER EIGHT

AT FIRST Hubert Scott used to go home every night. No matter if it was 4 A.M. when he was ready to leave Lillian, home he would go. Then one night he fell asleep in Lillian's apartment. It was noon when they awakened.

It was after one when he reached his own house and it was with fear and trepidation that he let himself in. Helen was out. Gone to attend a bridge luncheon, Nellie told him. Hubert wished that she had been home so that he could make his explanations and go back to Lillian. He didn't dare leave without seeing her. It would be harder to explain when next they met.

"Will she be home for dinner, Nellie?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Scott. She'll be home for dinner."

So Hubert spent the afternoon in Helen's chair dozing. When she came in, he awakened with a start. He was sorry that he had fallen asleep. She had the advantage now. He was a trifle befuddled. She would be smart enough, too, to see her advantage and fire her questions at him before he had time to collect his thoughts. Damn these clever wives. Especially clever jealous wives.

But Helen merely looked into the living-room, nodded to him, and walked upstairs. Gee, she was sore. Sore as a boil. He ought to have brought her something.

KEPT WOMAN

He was still wondering what he could have brought her when she came downstairs again. She was wearing a severely plain black satin dress with a narrow band of gold mesh at the neck and sleeves. He smiled to himself. Gee, couldn't Lillian and Louise give her some pointers on clothes though? He didn't know what Helen had paid for the dress, but whatever the price he'd bet that Lillian or Louise could have gotten three times that much gold mesh for the money.

"Hello," he said. "Suppose you've been worried about where I was last night."

He thought that an expression of surprise flitted across her face. He wasn't sure. Couldn't have been surprise though. Must have been anger.

"Well, I'll tell you, Helen. You know Steve Flynn?"

"Who?"

"Steve Flynn. You know the fellow who owns the big markets."

"Oh, yes," Helen said unconvincingly. "I know who you mean."

"Well, I ran into him just as I was on my way home to dinner yesterday. Hadn't seen him in a dog's age, you know. Well, Steve and I have always been good friends and he was glad to see me. He'd heard that I'd retired and he was all for getting me to take a job with him. He's just lost a man that he valued a lot and has had a deuce of a time replacing him. Begged me to take the job. I said no, of course. Made me go to dinner with him to talk things over. We got drinking. You know how fellows will do, and the first thing you know, Steve passes out cold. Well, I had to take Steve home

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and he gets those suicide ideas, you know, when he's drunk. All the fellows know that about him. Yeh, always tries to kill himself when he's drunk. I had to stay with him, of course. Gee, I'd never forgive myself if he jumped out of a window or something. I was with him till noon today."

"Quite an adventure," Helen remarked. "I suppose his wife was out of town."

"Yes, visiting some relatives in Buffalo. It was terrible."

"I'll bet it was."

She was sitting on the couch smoking idly. Hubert dared to look at her. The expression on her face was one of complete serenity. She believed him then. Wives could be fooled if a fellow went about it right.

"Were you worried?" he asked.

"Well, to tell the truth, Hubert, I wasn't here. I chaperoned a group of young people last night for theater and dancing afterward. It was after three o'clock when Hubert and I got in. I never dreamed that you weren't in your bed. Then I slept late this morning and naturally supposed that you had already gone out."

"Oh, you did? Well, can you imagine that. Yeh, I was taking care of Stevie. He always gets those suicide ideas when he's drunk."

"Do you think you'll take that job he offered you?"

"I don't know. Why?"

"Well, I was thinking that if you did, you'd probably see quite a lot of him and that would mean that you'd have to cope with his mania frequently."

"Yes, I guess it would. Oh, I won't take the job un-

KEPT WOMAN

less, of course, he can't get anybody else. I wouldn't leave a friend in a hole. Responsible men are hard to find. Of course if he can't get anybody else I'll have to take the job. I suppose I will have to finally."

"I thought so," murmured Helen.

After that Hubert rarely came home at night. What was the use of going home for a few hours' sleep and then rushing back to Lillian? Of course if Helen didn't believe his stories then he'd have to go home, because he was a fellow who hated trouble. But Helen believed him. She accepted his stories contentedly and without question.

"In fact," as he told Lillian, "she, not meaning to, gave me the greatest idea. She said that if I was to take the job with Steve Flynn I'd see a lot of him and have to stay away a lot taking care of him. So of course I told her the next day that I took the job with him. It explains everything and, boy, my actions need some explaining. If she ever gets on to it, she'll brain me."

"Well, you're being careful, ain't you?"

"Sure. I told her that owing to the job being vacant a month that a lot of work has piled up and I work night and day on it besides having to cope with Steve Flynn's drunkenness."

"Suppose she ever meets Flynn?"

"She wouldn't speak to him if she did. You don't know Helen. High hat and cold, that's her. If a person doesn't play bridge, speak French, and just adore antiques they're out with her."

"But she *might* meet him and speak to him."

"She wouldn't, honest, Lil; you don't know Helen.

KEPT WOMAN

Anybody who's a friend of mine is poison to start with. She'd go to Times Square by way of China to avoid having to walk on the same block with a friend of mine."

Lillian frowned and walked to the kitchen. He had called her Lil. He knew she hated that. As a matter of fact she hated Lillian, too. She had had her Christmas cards engraved "Lili Cory" and that was the name she gave now whenever it was necessary for her to give her name.

"What's for dinner?" Hubert asked, following her to the kitchen.

"I don't know yet. Louise is going to bring the dinner things in."

"I don't like her to do that. They haven't much money."

"Oh, I gave her five dollars last night to get the things with. I thought it would save me from going out."

"Does she know Anna is here?"

"Sure."

"Anna didn't want her to know about—"

"Oh, I told Billy and Louise that Anna had grippe like she told me to. But they won't believe me. They're not fools."

"When will she be able to go home?"

"Tomorrow, I guess. Poor kid, that was a filthy trick Fred played on her. I wonder where he went? Gee, what would have become of her if it wasn't for you, Hubert?"

"For you, you mean. I only laid out the hundred

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bucks that the thing cost. You took her down there, you brought her back, you telephoned her mother and asked if she could stay with you for a while, you called the store and said she was sick. You've waited on her hand and foot. You treated that girl like she was your sister."

"Don't tell anybody, Hubert, about her trouble. If they suspect, that's not our fault, but don't let them hear it from us."

"Oh, I wouldn't. Say, Lil, I think I'll take a little nap till dinner is ready. Do you mind?"

"Well, Anna's still in the bed. Could you take it on the couch?"

"Sure."

Hubert went to the living-room and Lillian remained seated on the green chair at the green table in the kitchen. She sort of wished that Anna wasn't there. She felt sleepy, too. If Anna was somewhere else now she and Hubert could nap till, say, six-thirty; then they could have dinner at a restaurant and perhaps go to a show. It would be easy to call Louise and tell her not to come. But Anna was there and soon dinner would have to be prepared for five people. Lillian glanced out the window and saw her new Nash roadster coming up the street. She shuddered. Billy had just missed bumping its fender against that parked truck.

"Hubert, here's Billy and Louise."

"All right."

"You weren't asleep yet, were you?"

"No such luck."

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Billy and Louise arrived. Billy was in a bad humor and Louise hadn't brought dinner things.

"I forgot them," she explained. "Billy's got yelling at me about something and I forgot. Can't we go out for dinner?"

"No," said Lillian. "I told you that Anna was here sick. We can't leave her alone."

"What's the matter with her?" Billy asked.

"Grippe, I told you."

"If I believe that, you'll tell me another."

"I don't care whether you believe it or not. She has grippe."

Even Billy knew when not to fool with Lillian. He saw that she was peevish about something. Hell, what did she have to be sore about? If she said one more thing he didn't like, he'd take Louise and they'd go home.

"You have your things on, Lou. Go to the store, will you?" Lillian asked.

"Oh, I'm tired, Lillian. Honest I am. Can't you phone?"

"It's too late. If I phoned now, we'd never get the stuff."

"I'll go," said Hubert.

"All right. Get three and a half pounds of sirloin steak and a can of corn—better get two cans and a cake of some kind and butter, and don't forget bread."

"All right."

Hubert went out and Billy sat down in the living-room to read his paper. Louise stood in the kitchen talking while Lillian peeled the potatoes.

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"What's the matter with Anna, anyway?" she whispered.

Lillian turned angry gray eyes upon Louise. "Grippe, I told you," she said. "How many more times must I tell you?"

"What are you so sore about?"

"Nothing, I'm just in a nasty humor, I suppose."

"Well, I guess we'd better go."

"Don't be foolish. I sent Hubert for three and a half pounds of steak. We can't eat it alone."

Louise went to the other room and sat down beside Billy. "She saw the way you came down the street with her car," she whispered.

"Go on. She's sore because you didn't get the things for dinner. Cripes, she thinks you're a servant girl."

Nothing was further from Lillian's mind than the thought that Louise was a servant girl. She was peeling the twelfth potato when Hubert returned.

"Get everything?" she asked.

"I hope so."

"I hope so, too. Go in and see if Anna wants anything, will you? I haven't had a chance to go in."

"Oh, I don't like to go in. She's always bawling. Get Louise to go in."

"Here, stick the steak under the light, will you? I'll go in."

Lillian went in. Anna was bawling. She was lying back against the pillows daubing at her eyes with one of Lillian's handkerchiefs.

"Oh, come on, Anna, turn off the weeps. Billy and

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Louise are here. You don't want them to hear you crying, do you?"

"I was crying quietly," said Anna with dignity. Her tone accused Lillian of trying to snatch her simplest pleasure from her.

"Well, cheer up. The little blue bird of happiness isn't very far off now. Just around the next corner. April showers bring May flowers and besides it's raining violets."

"I know you're trying to cheer me up, Lillian, but please don't be silly. I don't feel like it."

"I'm cooking a gorge' dinner. A big, thick steak and French fried potatoes. Will you eat a lot?"

"Just some chicken broth, please."

"Oh, have some steak."

"It would catch in my throat, Lillian. Please, just some chicken broth."

Lillian went out, closing the door behind her. In the living-room she motioned to Hubert and he followed her to the kitchen.

"You'll have to go out again," she said. "Anna wants some chicken broth."

"All right."

"I hope you don't mind."

He was in the living-room putting on his coat. "No, I'll take the roadster this time," he called in to her.

"It's just about out of gas," Billy remarked. "It won't take you farther than around the corner to the garage."

"Oh," said Hubert.

Dinner was at a quarter of seven. Anna had her broth

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brought to her in bed. She didn't feel like going to the table. Billy and Louise were very hungry and they ate in silence. After five minutes of eating as though he had a train to catch, Hubert fell asleep. Lillian wasn't hungry. She smoked and flicked ashes on her portion of steak.

"That's disgusting, to waste food like that," Louise remarked. "Think of the people right here in New York who are hungry tonight."

"*You* think of them, I'm too tired," Lillian said.

"What have you got to be tired about?" Louise asked. "I've been traipsing all over New York looking for a job and you've just been sitting here."

"Yeh, Lou, a lot of job-hunting you did," Billy put in.

"Well, I did some and I hate it. I wish I hadn't stayed off to help you furnish this place, Lillian. I'd never have done it if I'd 'a' known that they'd 'a' fired me."

"What do you want to work for?" Lillian asked.

Her question was a slight reminder that after all Louise was getting along as well as she ever did. Lillian looked meaningly at the dress Louise was wearing. It was black crêpe de Chine and it was piped with emerald green. The skirt flared and had scallops around the bottom. Lillian had bought the dress on a day when she had taken Louise shopping with her. It had cost fourteen dollars and ninety-five cents. Hubert had given her a hundred dollars to get some dresses with, and in a shop on Dyckman Street the orgy had been staged. Lillian had bought five dresses for herself and that one

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for Louise because she had pitied Louise's frank envy.

"I don't want to work," said Louise, "but he wants me to. I don't see no sense in it, because we're going to be married soon and then I won't work."

"Who told you?" Billy asked.

"I know I won't work. I ain't going to work after we're married and that's settled. And we're going to be married next month."

"Why?" asked Lillian. "Why don't you wait a year yet?"

"Well, because I don't want to. You know how it is with Billy and me. Everybody knows how it is and I feel so cheap and common."

"Well, there you are," said Lillian, rising briskly and beginning to clear the table. "That's the way the world goes. Come on, Hubert, wake up. I'll have to go in and get that tray from Anna. Is that rain?"

She walked to the window and stood silent for many minutes, gazing out at the rain-swept court. A strange sense of loneliness had come suddenly upon her. She wished Hubert would awaken. She needed his booming voice to assure her of her importance and her security. Billy and Louise were strangers, hostile strangers at that moment. She knew that presently she would turn around and that there would be her living-room and all the beloved familiar objects and old Billy with his line of wisecracks and Louise who was well-meaning but thoughtless and above all else her friend.

She turned, but there was nobody there to assure her. Hubert still slept. Billy read his paper and Louise powdered her face and frowned critically at herself.

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A stanza of a poem that Lillian had learned in the lower grades of school returned to her.

"I see the lights of the village
Gleam through the rain and the mist,
And a feeling of sadness comes o'er me
That my soul cannot resist."

Yes, it did make you feel sad to look at the lights through the rain. Sad and something else. You got a feeling that you wanted to go somewhere or do something. You couldn't bear quiet and dullness when you looked at the lights through the rain. There wasn't any connection or meaning, but you wanted to go.

"Hubert, Hubert, will you for God's sake wake up? Put a record on the Victrola, Billy, will you? Come on, Louise, let's get the dishes done."

"Oh, are you going to do them tonight? I thought we'd just pile them up in the kitchen and then I'd come over in the morning and we'd get them out of the way."

"Anna's calling you," Billy said.

"Coming," called Lillian. She found Anna sitting on the edge of the bed pulling on her stockings.

"I can't stay in here any more. I'm going crazy. I'm coming outside with you folks."

"All right, I'll help you dress."

It took fifteen minutes to get Anna outside. Louise had not cleared the table. Lillian scraped the plates and began to carry them out. Anna sat by the window looking at the rain and weeping softly.

"You'll make your grippe worse sitting by the window," Louise said sweetly. "There might be a draught."

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"I'm all right," said Anna.

"Is Fred coming up to see you?" Louise pursued.

"No. He's—he's busy."

"Oh, I see."

Louise went then to help stack the dishes on the tubs. She observed with regret that there was a roach on the wall in Lillian's kitchen. It was beyond her how people allowed roaches to get into their apartments. And Lillian was so immaculate about her person, too.

Till ten o'clock Louise and Billy danced to the Victrola music while Anna cried and Hubert slept. Lillian sat watching her friends dance. Billy didn't ask her to dance but she didn't care. She was a rotten dancer anyhow. She smoked innumerable cigarettes and thought her thoughts. She looked at Hubert. He was still in the red tapestry chair. Then she looked at Anna with her elbows on the window sill, her streaming eyes staring out at the streaming weather. Funny how Hubert and Anna didn't care that there were other people around. Could you call them immodest? Lillian searched her mind for a record of herself ever crying or sleeping in public. Probably everybody, she concluded, had a few things that they just couldn't do.

Louise dropped exhausted on the couch.

"All tired out?" Lillian asked unnecessarily.

Louise nodded. Billy stood waiting for her to resume the dance.

"Maybe Lillian would like to dance," Louise suggested. "Or Anna."

"We're too old," Lillian put in quickly. "Too old for that sort of thing."

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Anna rose and fled to the bedroom. Lillian followed.

"Cripes," Billy said, "it's like a morgue around here. What do you say? Shall we go?"

"Wait a minute. Lillian will be right back."

"What'll that get us? She's as lively as a stuffed dog herself. Let's shove off."

They were getting into their coats when Lillian came back.

"Oh, don't go yet," she said.

"Yeh, we got to. I've got a tough day ahead of me tomorrow." Billy adjusted the little green feather in the band of his hat and looked expectantly at Lillian.

He could look as expectant as he liked, she thought. She might need the car herself tomorrow. Hubert was going home for dinner and she'd be without a car. After all, it was hers. Gee, if you loaned a thing once to some people they thought they owned it.

"Yep, I'll have a tough day tomorrow."

"Suppose you will," Lillian said agreeably.

"You ought to buy yourself a bicycle, Billy," Louise suggested, "so that half your day wouldn't be taken up getting out to Jamaica."

"Yeh, I'd look cute on a bicycle."

Lillian laughed pleasantly. Billy and Louise waited with their eyes fixed anxiously upon her. A silence during which Louise searched her purse for a handkerchief. The other two watched her interestedly.

"I think maybe I'll buy a little Ford," Billy said at length. "I can't stand this train business much longer."

"Yes, I would if I were you." Lillian moved two inches nearer the door as she spoke.

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Billy and Louise stood rooted to the spot.

"Just imagine you with two cars and me without even a bicycle," Billy mourned.

"Yep, it's a sad world," said Lillian.

Billy saw that he would have to take the plunge. Some people are so dumb that it's a waste of time to use finesse on them.

"You don't care if I take your car, do you, Lillian?" he asked casually. "I'll have it back here by five-thirty."

"No, go ahead," she said weakly. "I won't be needing it."

Oh, well, what the hell. It was easier to give it to him than refuse. And she probably wouldn't be needing it. She did hope though that he'd be careful.

"Well, good night, Lillian." Billy was briskly shepherding Louise across the foyer. "Tell Hubert we said good night."

"I will. Listen, what time will I see you tomorrow?"

"Around five-thirty," Billy said.

"I meant Louise."

"Oh," Louise puckered her brow thoughtfully. "Well, I'll be looking for a job all day and I'll meet Billy at Fifty-Ninth Street like I did today and we'll be up together. That'll be around five-thirty."

"I see," said Lillian. "Hubert won't be here for dinner tomorrow and I guess Anna will be gone. I'll be alone. Can you have dinner with me?"

"Sure. I'll bring things in. Honest, I won't forget them tomorrow."

"All right. Good night."

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They went then and Lillian walked back to the living-room. She kicked Hubert gently in the shin.

"I'm awake," he said. "Tell Billy to put another record on."

"They're gone. Wake up, will you? I'm lonesome."

Hubert held his eyes open long enough to scan the living-room and be assured that she wasn't fooling him. His eyes closed again as he murmured, "They're gone, huh? What time is it?"

"About ten-thirty."

"I have to go put your car in the garage."

"Billy took it."

Hubert's eyes flew open, this time without an effort. "Again?" he asked.

"Yes. You don't mind, do you? I felt sorry for him. He does work awfully hard, you know. He didn't want to take it. I had to almost force it on him. I knew you wouldn't care. He's careful with it." After all Billy and Louise were her friends.

"Oh, sure, it's all right. They're good kids."

"Now, for heaven's sake, don't go to sleep again. Oh, my God."

Sleep had claimed Hubert once more. Lillian went to the kitchen and started on the dishes. No soap-flakes and no yellow soap. Hell. How was it that she never could remember to get things like that? Plenty of hot water anyhow. That was one good thing. She'd have to use bathroom soap and just pray that the plates and cups didn't get a sweet lavender scent. The dishes had to be done tonight. It was an awful thing to get up in

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the morning and have a load of dirty dishes staring you in the face.

It took forty-five minutes to tidy the kitchen and even then she had slighted the coffee pot and the broiler. At least a gallon of greasy water had spilled on the front of her dress. She didn't own an apron. Never could remember to buy one. It was an accordion-pleated dress and would cost at least two dollars and seventy-five cents to restore it to its original beauty. She turned her diamond and sapphire ring inward. Maybe that would remind her to get soap and aprons tomorrow.

She went back to the living-room. "Come on, Hubert, wake up. What the hell's the matter? Are you dead?"

Hubert grunted reassuringly.

Lillian tugged at the couch coaxingly. She wanted it to open and make a "surprisingly comfortable not to say luxurious bed."

"Wait a minute," Hubert said, "and I'll help you."

Lillian got it open and went to the hall closet for sheets and blankets. She made the bed and put two cretonne-covered pillows from the couch upon it. Anna was using the regular bed pillows.

"Now," she said, "for heaven's sake, climb in."

"My pajamas are in the bedroom," he objected.

Lillian went to get them. Anna was undressed and sitting stiffly in the pink upholstered chair. She wasn't crying and Lillian became alarmed.

"What's the matter?"

Anna rested reproachful eyes upon Lillian. "What's the matter!" she exclaimed.

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"Well, I thought something new was the matter. Get into bed."

"I will. I was just sitting here thinking."

"Don't do it. It's bad for you. You'll bust a blood vessel."

Lillian got Hubert's pajamas and her own nightgown out of the closet. "Good night," she said. "Get some sleep."

Hubert had condescended to awaken. He was prowling around the living-room with his tie off and his shirt open and draping gracefully over the top of his trousers.

"Yep, good kids, Louise and Billy," he said as though he were thus pleasantly terminating a lengthy conversation concerning them.

Lillian flung his pajamas at him. "Surround yourself with these," she said.

"I don't feel like going to bed. I'm wide awake."

The look which Lillian gave him needed no accompanying words. She undressed silently and got into bed. Hubert did likewise and he was asleep in a minute's time.

Lillian tossed restlessly on the small cretonne pillow for nearly an hour but at last felt sleep drawing near. She closed her eyes and lay waiting to drop into a doze. She heard her bedroom door open and the pit-pat of Anna's slippers in the hall. She was not disturbed till she heard the clinking of bottles being moved about on the glass shelves of the medicine chest. Good God, there was iodine there and lysol and a liniment that was probably poison. Would Anna be such a fool?

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With a sudden leap Lillian was out of bed and at the door of the bathroom.

"Anna, are you all right?"

"Yes, why?"

"I heard you moving things about in the medicine chest and I thought maybe you—"

Anna's voice was a polite mingling of oil and ice. "I wanted an aspirin tablet. Of course I didn't know I would wake everybody up. Do you mind my rummaging in here?"

"Of course not, you fool. I just thought I could help you."

"I'm all right. Good night."

"Good night."

Lillian went back to her half of the couch. She dreamed that night that she was again living with the Friedrichs and working hard. She awakened while it was still dark and lay thinking over the dream. Working! Ugh. Only two months ago that dream had been reality. She raised herself up on one elbow and quietly bent over and kissed Hubert on the forehead. He had changed everything.

CHAPTER NINE

SOMETIMES Lillian and Hubert took trips in the Packard. Quite suddenly the notion would strike them that this was the day to see Washington or Philadelphia or Albany and off they would go. It would always be a Sunday. It never occurred to them that being people of leisure, they were free to go on a Tuesday or Wednesday when traffic was light and motoring consequently more pleasant. Either of them would have told you that Sunday was the day for a nice long ride.

They would have no inkling on Saturday that they were going; so they always left a roast of beef or a chicken in the ice-box which was generally spoiled by Monday evening when Lillian was ready to cook it. Neither she nor Hubert was much on answering the dumbwaiter bell at 8 A.M. and taking the ice which they very badly needed by Monday morning. Always as she crowded the tainted meat into her perpetually full garbage pail Lillian reflected that it had been a sin to waste it and hereafter she would present the janitress with what she couldn't use while it was still in fit condition.

The drives were a delight to her. She loved taking the wheel of the Packard when Hubert grew tired. He had taught her to drive and she had acquired a skill and mastery of cars which he had never known. Sometimes he would look at the speedometer and see forty

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and he would shout at her to slow down. Then she would sulkily draw up to the side of the road and make him take the driver's seat. They would do twenty then till Hubert once more grew tired.

Sometimes on the road at night a car would seem to be pursuing them and they would grow uneasy. Always they would think of Helen and try to identify the dim figures in the car behind. Lillian would become thoughtful over Hubert's deep concern. If Helen found them together she could do no more than divorce Hubert. Why did that prospect frighten him so? It was then that she would become uneasy. The Packard would slow down and invariably the other car would shoot ahead of them and soon show them nothing but the tiny red flicker of its tail-light disappearing in the distance. Hubert would laugh then, loudly. But it would be nearly an hour before Lillian would speak again.

Sometimes they would take Billy and Louise with them on their little journeys. Billy would sing in the back of the car and Louise would join in the chorus. Then he would fight with her, telling her that she was flat. Lillian would say they both were. An inn, always an expensive one, would provide them with dinner. Billy would become conscience-stricken over past inattentions and help Louise into her coat while Hubert paid the check. Lillian would stand close to him as he broke the inevitable fifty-dollar bill. She wanted even the waiter to know which one of the two was her man.

Sometimes they'd pass what Lillian had always thought was an apple orchard. Billy would also think it was such and remark perhaps that there was an apple

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orchard. Hubert would inform them that they were peach trees and the two men would argue. Lillian would settle the argument when they were two miles past the trees by assuring them that she had seen tiny, green peaches. She had never known Hubert to be wrong, so why not squash the argument? Since knowing him Lillian had had many questions indubitably settled. She knew now that appendicitis did come from swallowing grape seeds, that a governor's pardon or refusal to pardon is subject to the prison warden's desire, that the American Revolution was won by the Colonists because Washington and King George were both Masons and made a little friendly agreement between themselves, and that the girl one sees on magazine covers is always the artist's wife.

Sometimes they took Anna with them. She was not good company but they pitied her. She told them often how bravely she had carried herself through a tragic love affair, seeming to forget that Hubert had paid the wages of sin with a hundred-dollar check and that Lillian had wet-nursed Anna's folly.

Once they had invited Theresa and Hymie, but Theresa had brought along a basket of fruit and sandwiches and a thermos bottle full of coffee. She said it was ridiculous to pay the prices of the inns along the road, that she and Hymie couldn't afford it and didn't expect to stick Hubert with the bill; so this was her party. Hubert felt cheated when forced to return to the city with an unbroken fifty-dollar bill and Lillian had hated sitting in the car eating sandwiches. She had laughed a lot while doing it to assure passing motorists

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that this was just a lark and not the sort of thing which she did normally.

Once they had Mary Jackson and her baby come along, but the baby wet the upholstery and Hubert had assured Mary that that was all right, but Lillian had detected a look in his eyes which had caused her to cross Mary and her baby off her invitation list.

Sometimes they stayed overnight in the town where they found themselves. They could do that when they were alone or when they had Billy and Louise with them. Louise had never gone back to work and Billy was less inclined than ever toward the paint business. He had had an audition in a radio station and had been permitted to broadcast three or four times at 9.15 A.M. Since those thrilling minutes of singing to his unseen audience Billy had become a listless salesman and cared very little what time or what day he put in an appearance on the Long Island territory. Hubert and Lillian had bought a radio set especially to hear him and gave further proof of their interest by dragging themselves out of bed to listen. They had been loud in their praise and Hubert had gone so far as to say that Billy was wasting his time selling paint. Billy had remarked that a fellow had to live and Hubert had assured him that any time he wanted to devote all his time to his talent he could depend on his pal Scotty to see him through. So seldom and still more seldom did Billy apply himself to Jamaica and vicinity and often and more often did he approach his pal Scotty for twenty till the sixteenth of the month. The sixteenth always came and

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Hubert always said that Billy could forget it and Billy always did.

Sometimes when he and Lillian were driving alone Hubert would fix his eyes on the ribbon of a road that wound before them and he would be quiet for many minutes while he thought. Seventy-five dollars a month for the apartment, fifty dollars for the two cars in a garage; then there was the telephone, gas, and electricity. His notes to meet on the Nash, fifty dollars pocket money for Lillian; then there were clothes, recreation, and Billy. Ice, food, and gasoline must be added; also an occasional gift here and there. Mary Jackson had had a baby and it had cost one hundred dollars to present the upholstery-wetting brat with a crib, a high chair, a wardrobe, and a couple of blankets. Anna Leitz hadn't had a baby and it had cost a hundred dollars just the same. Of course a fellow likes doing things for poor unfortunates who are broke, but Hubert had never guessed that so many people could be broke till he met Lillian. Cripes, what would they have done without him?

He would grow frightened as he stared his responsibilities in the face. Fifteen thousand dollars wasn't the bank roll he had thought it was. He'd have to call a halt somewhere. He would have to tell Lillian that it was necessary to cut down. He had never told her just how much he had. Maybe he should have. He would look at her then and she would look back at him. Something in her large eyes and painted mouth would reassure him. They were having a good time. Why spoil

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it with needless worry? After all he could always get a swell job if he wanted it. Look at the experience he had, and it was easy to make money when you were somebody. Fifteen thousand dollars couldn't come to a fellow as easily as it had come to him if a fellow didn't have a natural knack for making money. Why, if he wanted it he could probably actually get a big job with Steve Flynn. The thought would make him laugh and he would step on the gas and make the Packard do as much as twenty-five. He'd pull through. Nobody need worry about Hubert Scott's future—least of all himself.

The first hot day of the year had been a Sunday and they had gone alone into the country. Billy and Louise were being married that day. Hubert and Lillian had been invited to the wedding, but Lillian had said that she would rather go for a ride. They had sent a chest of silver-plated tableware to the happy couple. Lillian was certain that Louise wouldn't know what half the forks were for and she sincerely hoped that Louise wouldn't ask her.

Hubert and Lillian had stood in a lush field and Lillian had felt lonely and on the point of crying. A nest in a tree looking secure and divinely simple had struck a chill to her heart. The strong tree with the little nest tucked safely away in its branches stood outlined against the deep blue sky. A guileless and homely friend who says, "I'm very happy and I hope you are, too." Looking at the nest Lillian had suddenly thought of Louise and had clutched at Hubert's arm and said that they must go. She looked back at the nest as she and Hubert

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stepped over the tall, sweet grass. She told Hubert that the tree had scared her. It had stood there as dignified as God. They had started back to town then and Lillian had talked of Louise all the way and laughed at her for getting married in a church and fussing about it as though nobody had ever gotten married before. Hubert was surprised. He had always thought that Lillian was too fond of Louise to jeer at her. Women were funny, even Lillian.

Sometimes they did not drive but sat at home playing checkers. Hubert had taught Lillian to play and she said that she liked it. Often she even suggested the game herself and then Hubert was pleased with her.

Sometimes Lillian read books from the circulating library while Hubert sat thumbing the pages of *Popular Mechanics*. She bought a dictionary and looked up unfamiliar words which she encountered along the way. It was a good book whose author knew many uncommon words.

Sometimes Hubert went home for dinner and stayed with his family till the next day. Lillian would feel lost and unhappy. She would take Louise with her to Keith's Fordham or shopping along Dyckman Street. There was always a little door in her brain that swung open at his departure and showed her a small furnished room and a bakery where one could get dinner for forty-five cents. She would drink too much on the nights when he was away and be violently ill all the next day. She came upon magazine stories frequently wherein the "other woman" lost out in the competition with the man's lawful wife. She went to a fortune teller once who told

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her that she was safe and secure so long as she accepted the situation and did not herself seek to change it. After that she was more comfortable.

Sometimes they gave parties to their friends and their friends' friends. They would be noisy parties to which the neighbors objected. Lillian would fetch and carry Bromo-Seltzer till she herself passed out and was put to bed by Hubert or Billy. They were not meaningless gay gatherings as so many parties are. People did not merely meet, drink, eat, dance, and say good night. Married couples threshed out their difficulties here and single couples decided to marry or perhaps separate forever. Loves and enmities developed and no one thought of meeting either with subterfuge. Lillian was adept at staving off a fight and warning a flirtatious wife of her husband's disapproval. She knew just the moment when everybody needed a cup of black coffee, but nobody ever knew when she needed it; so frequently she was among the missing.

There were holes in the living-room rug and in the upholstery of the sofa. People were careless with cigarettes, but Hubert and Lillian didn't mind. That all came under the heading of amusement.

Sometimes Lillian sat by her window, and gazing out at the garden court, wondered what it was all for—the parties, the liquor, the two cars, her and Hubert and the whole damn world.

But mostly she could be seen smoking contentedly and sitting somewhere very close to Hubert so that a person could tell at a glance that he was hers.

CHAPTER TEN

BILLY and Louise had dropped in for a quiet evening. Billy had sung two numbers for them which he intended to use on his next program, nine-fifteen Wednesday morning. Louise said it was silly for him to rehearse so much as nobody listened anyhow at that hour. Her argument was that if the station actually had an audience at 9.15 A.M. they certainly wouldn't put Billy on the air.

"Aw, shut up," said Billy. "You ought to have seen the mail I drew down from my broadcasts. I had a letter from a dame up in Connecticut who heard the program and asked me to sing some of her favorites next time. She sent me a list of the songs she liked. I got it here somewhere. Then there was a man wrote and said I sung as good as Al Jolson. In fact he said that he didn't like Jolson. Don't you ever worry that nobody's listening to me, kid."

"Oh, I wasn't worried," his wife assured him.

Hubert laughed impartially as the Fishers insulted each other. He got a kick out of their arguments. It was easy seen that they didn't mean a thing by what they said. Just good kids, all the time fooling.

Lillian had grown a wee bit tired of the never-ending squabbles. She sat frowning at Billy as he gave them a little illustration of Louise's dumbness.

"And the Chink waiter says to her, 'No, ma'am, we

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don't serve no American dishes at all'; so the Madame here speaks up and says, 'All right, then bring me some spaghetti.' Ain't that the limit?"

"Well, I didn't know," Louise protested. "He did say that they didn't sell American food but he didn't say they only had Chinese. How was I to know?"

"Oh, how do you know that it won't snow in August?"

"It has," Louise solemnly remarked.

Billy howled.

"You're just so damn ignorant," Louise proceeded, "that you won't learn when somebody is trying to teach you. Up at my aunt's farm in August of the year that my cousin Minnie had little Martha it snowed!"

"Where's your aunt's farm? In Iceland?"

"You know it ain't, you dope. Many's the time you've been to Aunt Carrie's and she fed you damn good, too."

"Speaking of food," Lillian put in, "I'll make some waffles."

She had taken to waffle-making at every lull in the conversation. There was something very elegant about sitting at the table and preparing food on a nice, shiny electrical apparatus. It made Lillian feel like a magazine lady who always has a white-capped maid at her beck and call and sits down to breakfast at a table which she painted herself in an idle moment and found dry before her guests arrived.

Nobody questioned the merit of Lillian's waffles. They were pretty, yellow-brown, and had indentations in the proper places. They were successful because they looked successful. Everybody ate two waffles and drank

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two cups of coffee. Lillian observed as she lighted a cigarette that Hubert would have to run to the store before breakfast as there was now no butter.

"What are you people going to do tomorrow?" Louise asked.

"I don't know," said Lillian.

"And you don't care, I suppose."

"Nope." The answer was not intended to be an admission of reckless despair. Lillian was merely trying to avoid a long and tiresome discussion of how she would spend her Tuesday.

She was surprised when Louise patted her tenderly on the shoulder and said, "I don't blame you for being fed up."

"What should she be fed up about?" asked Hubert, sourly.

"Aw, she's crazy," Billy put in. "Why don't you keep your mouth shut, Louise?" It was evident that Billy knew what to expect.

Louise ignored him and addressed herself to Hubert. She smiled warmly as she spoke and her manner was that of an ingenuous friend whose frank opinion has been requested. "Well, I mean the way you live, Scotty. Honestly, Billy can tell you that I was never happy before he and I were married. A man doesn't mind that kind of thing but girls do. I bet right now that Lillian is miserable."

"What's the matter with you, Lou? Drunk?" asked Lillian.

"There," said Louise, triumphantly, "that proves my point. See, she won't admit that she's unhappy."

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"Well, why should I say I am if I'm not?"

"But you are, Lillian, you know you are."

Lillian became annoyed. "I'm not unhappy," she insisted. "I've got more than you have out of life."

"No," Louise disagreed in sad and pitying accents, "I have Billy."

"But I don't want Billy."

"No, you want Hubert. And have you got him?"

"Certainly I have."

"How do you know you have? How can you be sure that he'll always come back to you from his visits to his family?"

"Oh, shut up, Louise," shouted Billy. "You're a God-damned idiot. These people can attend to their own affairs."

"Hubert is mine as much as Billy is yours," Lillian said. "I know he is."

"You don't *know* it and you can't know it till you two are married."

"You can't keep Billy from leaving you just because he married you."

"No, but I can lose him and still be respectable."

"That's a fool's satisfaction," said Lillian.

"Well, maybe I'm a fool," Louise mused pleasantly, "but I know you're not happy and you never will be till you're able to stop worrying over whether somebody's chasing your automobile or not."

"Listen, let's not talk about it any more, Louise. You'll only get me sore, and we've been good friends."

"That's why I brought the matter up, because we are

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good friends. Do you think Theresa Moss or Anna or Mary Jackson would think enough of you to bring it up?"

"Huh," said Billy. "Now you're mentioning girls who know how to mind their own business."

Lillian got up from the table with a firm purposefulness. "How many numbers will you sing on your next program, Billy?" she asked.

"About five, I guess."

"Gee, that's a lot to get down pat." Lillian spoke absently as she wiped off the waffle iron. She was wondering what Hubert was doing. He had left the kitchen. Had he gone to bed? Or was he just sitting sulkily in the living-room? She hoped he had not gone to bed. She wanted to speak to him. Oh, how she wanted to speak to him.

"I'll help you with the dishes, Lillian," Louise said. "I hope you're not sore at me."

"No, don't be silly. I don't get sore. Put that maple syrup business in the ice-box, will you? Watch out! Oh, that's all right. I'm always spilling something myself. I'll wipe it up. It's sticky, that syrup. It should have really stuck to your hand."

She kept talking as she washed the dishes. Never once did she permit a silence to fall. Billy had not left the kitchen but sat listening to Lillian and casting angry glances at his wife. He said nothing till the last dish was back in the closet and the last spoon returned to the drawer.

"Come on, Louise. Time to go home," he said then.

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"Oh, not so early," Lillian entreated. Her plea was a bit too earnest. Even the Fishers could see that she desired nothing so much as their departure.

"Yeh, we got to go." Billy wasted no time in getting his coat on and brushing Louise ahead of him to the door. No need to linger tonight and hint about the Nash. He wasn't going to bother about Jamaica tomorrow. He would have to stay in town Wednesday on account of the broadcast; so he might just as well take tomorrow off, too, and haunt the music publishing houses.

"Good night, Scotty," Billy called.

"Good night," Louise echoed.

Hubert's voice came from the living-room. "Oh, are you going? Good night."

He did not come out to see them down the stairs.

"I guess he's mad," Louise said.

"No," Lillian assured her. "I think he's just starting one of his well-known naps."

The Fishers knew that she didn't think that at all. They went out without making any arrangements for future meetings.

Lillian flew to the living-room. Hubert was sitting motionless on the couch staring at the opposite wall. He looked grave and thoughtful, like a man waiting in a doctor's reception room.

"Did you hear what she said to me?" Lillian asked him.

"What did she say?"

"What did she say! What's the matter with you? Are you crazy?"

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"Oh, you mean in the kitchen? I thought she'd said something new. You didn't seem to mind that. You've been friendly with her since she said it. I heard you laughing and talking out there."

"Of course I laughed and talked. I wouldn't let her know that she had hit me at all."

"Well, it hit me and got me damn sore. I've been sitting here thinking about it. How does she get that way, butting in on our business?"

Lillian lit a cigarette and fell into a chair. The chair's insides groaned and sagged beneath her weight. "It made me wild," she said, "to think that Louise of all people can feel sorry for me. I hate people to pity me, least of all somebody like her."

"Why somebody like her?"

"Because she lived with a fellow and then married him. Nobody feels so pure as some bum who's just got done sinning. And to think she's got the chance to be sorry for me. I swear the idea makes me so sick I could die."

Hubert leaned down and began to unlace his shoes. "What made me sore," he said, "was her butting in and saying that you was unhappy."

"Oh, well, maybe you can't understand my part of it. You ain't a girl. You don't know how a best friend always likes to have something to pity you for and how you'd sooner have strangers know about your blue moments. Gee, I bet she was in a rush to get married just so she could pull that song and dance tonight. The little bitch."

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"Well, don't worry about it any more, Lil. You needn't worry about me leaving you."

Lillian sighed with exasperation. "I don't think you're going to leave me," she said. "But that's got nothing to do with the case. I'm talking about Louise pitying me because I ain't respectable and certain of my future."

"Well, you can be certain of your future. I'm not going to leave you, I told you."

"Jees, you're turning this into a scene in which I beg you not to leave me! Shall I get on my knees? Don't you see that if you and I live together till we die of old age, I'll always be in the same position? I'll always be some one for married girls to pity. Cripes, Mary and Theresa probably pity me, too. Any damn fool with a marriage certificate can feel sorry for me even if she's married to some plug who can't buy her a pack of safety pins."

Hubert's face puckered into an expression of pain as he pulled off his shoe. He stood it under the couch with the heel pointing outward and regarded it interestedly for a moment or two before beginning on the next shoe.

"I wouldn't care," Lillian proceeded, "if Louise was somebody who had a right to be sorry for my soul. If she was a sweet innocent or something like that. But she's got the crust to be married for a couple of months and come rushing and telling me that I'm miserable because we're not respectable. And the idea, her saying that she never was happy till she got married."

Hubert was having a little difficulty in getting the

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second shoe exactly on a line with the first. In fact, it was only when he toed them to a crack between two floor-boards that he met with any sort of success.

"Jees, that Louise of all people should get a chance to be sorry for me."

Hubert didn't as a rule smoke cigarettes, but he went to the humidor and got one now. He had a feeling that this was all going to prove very trying. Lillian stared at his stockinged feet as he walked. He always wore gray socks. As she looked at them now, it occurred to her that there must be some reason why he always wore gray socks. She wanted to ask him but thought if she did right now he would get telling a story that would lead them far from the situation to be considered. Well, she'd ask him some other time.

"And the way that she pretended that she was doing me a favor by bringing that up," Lillian murmured.

"Oh, well, she's dumb, Lillian. Wasn't that a scream about her with the Chink and the spaghetti?"

"That sounded like her all right. Gee, I can't get over that. *She's* sorry for me. That gets me wild."

"Well," said Hubert, comfortingly, "you can't be pleased all the time. We can't have everything."

"I don't see why we can't."

"Because God or whoever it is who's dealing the cards don't give royal flushes all the time."

"I didn't mean everybody in the world when I said 'we.' I meant you and I. I don't see why we shouldn't have everything."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean why shouldn't you and I be married? Helen

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isn't a wife to you. She doesn't love you. Why can't you tell her about us and have her divorce you?"

"Oh, she wouldn't."

"How do you know she wouldn't?"

"I know Helen."

"Oh, horse-radish. You can't know in advance what she'd say if you asked her. And what can she do to you if she refuses? There's no harm in asking."

"Say, I know her almost as long as you've been on earth. I know what she'd do if I asked her."

"What would she do?"

"She'd say no."

"Well, if that's all she can do it's worth trying, isn't it?"

"What's the use when I know she'll say no?"

"You mean she'll be satisfied to stay married to you knowing you're living with another woman?"

"Sure. She hasn't let me come near her in an age anyhow. So it won't make any difference."

A sudden silence came down over the little cream-colored room. Lillian sat puffing on a new cigarette. Her face wore an angry, defiant look. Even her hair stood out in a warlike flare. Hubert had long since thrown his cigarette on a tray where it lay smoking and smelling. Hubert's expression was one of deepest solemnity. Cigarettes always made him a little ill.

Lillian cast a glance at him. Was he thinking it over? If he was, he evidently thought that anywhere within a week or two would be time enough to announce his decision. He gave no sign of thinking swiftly. She sighed and resorted then to a coward's plea.

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"If you cared for me," she said, "you'd ask her."

"Then Louise was right. You ain't happy."

"I was till she said that. I'm not now, knowing that everybody is sorry for me."

"Just because Louise is doesn't prove that everybody is."

"Well, she least of all I like feeling sorry for me. Besides I don't see why we shouldn't be married when Helen makes it plain that she doesn't love you."

"Now, Lillian, I wouldn't say that. Helen is different, you know. She loves me all right, but she ain't the kind to fall all over a person. I'm sure she loves me, that's why I know she won't give me up."

"Well, if you cared for me, you'd at least try."

"All right, I will, Lillian, the next time I see her. I'll fool around with the subject and see how she takes it."

"Why wait, Hubert? Look, put on your shoes now and go home. Spend tomorrow with her and speak up."

"Oh, Lillian!"

"All right, don't do it. Don't ask her at all. And thanks for letting me see how crazy you are about me."

For answer Hubert leaned over and pulled on his shoes. He smoothed down his hair with his hands and clapped his cap on to indicate that he was going to do as she had asked.

"Are you really going?" Lillian asked him.

"Yep. I'll ask her. I don't think it will do much good but I'll ask her."

"Well, it can't hurt to try."

"I don't suppose so."

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He walked around slamming closet doors importantly. He was in search of his suit coat which had been all the time on the couch beside him.

"Listen, Hubert, tell her that she isn't happy either the way things are. Explain to her, you know, she's never understood you and all."

"Yes, I will." He found his coat and put it on with brisk determination. "Well, so long, Lil, I'll be back for supper tomorrow evening."

"Good night, Hubert, I hope everything works out all right for us."

"So do I." He bent over and kissed her. She got up then and followed him to the door.

"Good night, Hubert."

"Good night, Lil. See you tomorrow."

There was a little delay in the garage. The men there had not expected that the Packard would be going out again that night and they had driven it close to the wall with three rows of cars in front of it. Hubert watched as other cars were shifted about to extricate the Packard. He played with the idea of going back to Lillian and telling her that something was wrong with the car and that none of the night men knew how to fix it. But she would undoubtedly tell him to take the Nash then. So long as he was going to inform his wife of Lillian's existence there would be no further need of concealing the roadster.

As a matter of fact Lillian would have done no such thing. Had he returned to the apartment then she would have let him go to bed without another reference to her unfortunate position. She was shocked and fright-

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ened at what she had done. Hers had never been an aggressive nature. People had always had their way with her. It terrorized her now to think that she had forced Hubert to make this important move. Also she felt abashed at her insolence in taking it for granted that she was of greater moment than Helen. Nothing but a sudden rage could have made her forget herself to such an extent. In sane moments she had always been satisfied with what she had in life and had taken it as a matter of course that Helen should be Mrs. Scott and she "Mrs. Cory." It was all Louise's fault. Something damn nasty would probably come of this. Even the fortune teller had advised against stirring up trouble. Of course fortune tellers were the bunk, but still once in a while they were right. She had gotten a letter from Europe directly after the fortune teller had said she would. It really wasn't for her. It had been put in her mail-box by mistake, but she had gotten it. She wished Hubert would come back for something or other so she could tell him not to go. Perhaps he never would come back at all. Maybe he hated her for her nerve in supposing that he would be willing to let Helen divorce him. She had had crust all right. Holy smokes, she had gone to him knowing he was married and then had whined and complained as though she had been tricked. God damn Louise anyhow.

Lillian went to bed, but she could not sleep. She tossed from one side of the bed to the other. God, what a sap she'd been to start this. She wished that there was some one to talk to so that the night would not seem so long. She thought of getting the Nash and taking a

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ride. She thought it all out, just how she would dress and just where she would go, but all the time she knew full well that she was going to stay in bed.

At fifteen-minute intervals she reached for a cigarette and lay in bed smoking and torturing herself with worry. She had spoiled everything and where had she gotten the crust to do it with? That wasn't like her at all. God damn Louise. She felt that she couldn't live through the hours that must pass before she would know the outcome of her stupidity.

At length she fell to building air castles. Suppose Hubert wasn't angry at her and suppose Mrs. Scott was willing to bring suit against him? That would be great. She and Hubert could be married and then let Louise try to find something to pity her for. Gee, she'd be respectable and she'd have money besides. She wished she knew Mrs. Scott so she could judge better what the interview would be like.

All night long Lillian wondered, feared, hoped, and cursed. It was dawn when from sheer exhaustion she fell asleep. She slept so soundly that she did not hear the dumbwaiter bell ring to announce garbage collection, nor a half hour later did she hear the iceman trying to split the battery with his violent assaults on the bell.

It was while the iceman was so unprofitably occupied that Hubert sat in the living-room of his house waiting for Helen to come down to breakfast. She had been in bed when he had arrived the night before; so this would be the zero hour when he would tell her that he wanted to be free. He felt hot and uncomfortable. Gee, this would be a job. He wished young Hubert

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were home so there would be an excuse for postponing the scene. God, this would be terrible. The palms of his hands were wet and his mouth was dry. He wished she would come so he could plunge right in and get it over with. He would start by saying, "Look here, Helen, you and I are not really suited to each other." He would look at her then and if she was taking it well maybe he'd also say, "We never were."

And it wouldn't be no lie either. Cripes, what kind of a wife was she anyhow for a guy like him? No pep in her. If she ever laughed she'd crack her face wide open. Lillian was the girl for him all right, and he'd tell Helen that she was. Hell, why be afraid to tell her? She couldn't do anything about it. Come to think of it, he was glad his son wasn't there. Might as well get this thing over. It might prove a little unpleasant and that sort of thing was best attended to right away.

Helen came floating down the stairs. She wore a kind of pink kimono with a train to it and feathery, fluffy stuff all around the neck and sleeves of it. What did she think she was—a movie actress? It did look pretty, though, especially with the collar of the kimono standing up stiff behind her curly white hair.

"Good morning," she said in surprise.

Nellie hurried from the kitchen and handed the morning paper to her mistress. "Oatmeal, Mrs. Scott, or corn flakes?" she asked. "I got both."

"Corn flakes, please, Nellie."

Helen became instantly absorbed in the front-page news. Hubert's eyes were fixed disapprovingly on the doorway through which Nellie had disappeared. What

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kind of training had that girl anyhow? He had been sitting here twenty minutes and she'd never offered him the morning paper and hadn't asked his choice in cereals at all. He'd have to speak to Helen about it. No, there wasn't any sense in that. He'd forgotten for a moment that he'd probably not be coming here any more. If Helen would stop reading he'd tell her right now about Lillian, but there wasn't any use in interrupting her. That might make her mad.

Nellie came to the French doors and announced breakfast. Hubert arose, and Helen, leaving the paper on her chair, said, "Thank you, Nellie," and swept toward the dining-room. She and Hubert collided at the threshold. Helen stepped back and said to him, "Pardon me. By all means precede me." He let her go first, then, but it was nice to know that despite Nellie's actions, Helen knew who was master of the house.

It seemed silly to start talking about Lillian the minute they sat down; so Hubert decided that when he finished his grapefruit he would begin. But Nellie appeared then and he thought perhaps he'd better wait till she had brought the cereal and gone again to the kitchen. It occurred to him, though, that she'd have to return for the cereal plates and to bring the eggs, and that would be the best time, when she had completely finished serving and he and Helen would be left alone.

No sooner had the bacon and eggs been served and Nellie back in her own domain than Helen spoke.

"Did Mr. Flynn give you today off?" she asked.

In his deep absorption in other matters Hubert had entirely forgotten Steve Flynn and the mythical job.

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"Oh, oh, yes," he managed. "I've got a big job, Helen. I'm not a clock puncher, you know. I can take whatever time I like."

"That's good," said Helen.

She was not one to squander words. He knew she meant something. "Why?" he asked.

"Because if you couldn't get off easily I'd have to take my car back."

"No kidding? How's that? What happened?"

"Hubert is going to business down in the city now and I've given him the Oakland for commuting. He doesn't like the trains. That leaves me all day without a car."

"So the kid's going to work, eh? That's great. I'll have to make him a little present. What could I get him?"

Helen regarded him for a moment without speaking; then she said, "I can use the taxis for getting back and forth from the village, but I want the car for shopping in the city and going up to Stamford to see Wilma Lawrence. So long as you can get off easily, though, I'll just phone the office when I need the car and you can bring it up. If you'll give me the number and do that I'll be able to let you keep the car."

"Well, you can't get me at the office often because I'm in and out all the time. I'll phone you instead."

"Why phone me? Just bring the car when you have a feeling that I'm going to need it."

"No, here's what I meant. I'll phone you every night around nine or ten o'clock that I'm away and you can

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tell me then whether you'll be needing the car next day."

"I'm not always in either."

"You can tell Nellie whether you'll be wanting it or not and she'll tell me. How is that?"

"All right, I suppose, but don't forget to phone or I'll positively take the car back."

"I won't forget to phone."

Helen stood up and started for the door, casting a glance at the clock as she walked. Hubert remained at the table, gazing after her. She was so tall and proud and so damn sure she was doing him a favor. Cripes, he had another car. What would she say if she knew that? She was always trying to make people afraid to talk to her. Who couldn't have the upper hand in a conversation? You only had to be nasty to do that. She had nothing to act superior about anyhow. Who did she think she was?

He finished his breakfast and went to the living-room, where he scanned the morning paper and cursed Helen. When she came downstairs again he'd tell her something. She had him sore now. He'd tell her that there was a girl worth ten of her who worshiped the ground he walked on.

It was over an hour before Helen returned. He had begun to fear that she had gone back to bed. She was dressed for golf when she appeared at the foot of the stairs. Except for her hair she looked absurdly like a girl.

Nellie bustled out of the kitchen. "Shall I phone for a cab, Mrs. Scott?"

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"No, thank you. Mrs. Winters is calling for me. Oh, here she is now." Helen looked into the living-room at her husband. "Hubert," she said, "don't come up here again with that fool worsted doll hanging on the back window of the car. A man ought to have his license revoked for doing a thing like that. It proves he's not responsible."

"All right, I'll take it off."

"Thank you. Good-by."

"Bye."

Jees, she had a nerve to give orders. So sure, too, that they would be obeyed. Just as though he was afraid of her. Like hell he'd take that doll down. Oh, well, the devil with Helen anyhow. He'd get back to Lillian now. There was a girl who wasn't always acting as though she was somebody a person ought to be afraid of.

Lillian was still in bed when he arrived just before noon. Her pretty face was white and drawn and there were purple smears beneath her eyes. She raised her plump, bare arms to him and wound them about his neck. "Was it bad?" she asked breathlessly. "What did Helen say?"

"It was pretty bad, kid. She threatened to shoot herself if I left her. I tried to reason with her but it was no use. Gee, I pitied her. She's so old, you know, in her ways, and she really has nothing to live for, no interests really outside of me. I gave in, Lil. Gee, we can't let her kill herself."

"No, of course not. But we can be a little freer now that she knows about me, can't we? We won't have to worry about people she knows seeing us together."

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Hubert bit his lip and looked away from her. "Lil," he said, "I had to tell her something to make her stop raving. I told her I wouldn't see you any more. Gee, I had to, Lil. You ought to have seen her. She was like crazy. So we'll have to be just as careful as ever. And I have to phone her on nights when I'm going to be away."

"What's that for?"

"Just to assure her that everything's O.K. I suppose she'll ask me to come up about every time I speak to her and I'll have to do it the next day. But, gee, that's the only thing I can do. I swear I was frightened. Thought she'd take poison or something when I told her how things were."

"I guess it was awful."

"It was, Lil."

"I'm sorry I started it."

"Oh, that was all right. I'd have done it myself when I first met you, only I knew what she was like. The hysterical type, you know, jealous and excitable as hell. I feel sorry for her every time there's something important to talk over. She's so high-strung."

Hubert took his shoes off and stretched himself on the bed beside Lillian. Neither of them said a word for several minutes.

Then: "Say, Lil, we got to take that worsted doll down from the back of the car. It looks lousy."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THERESA's apartment, unlike its owner, was bright and cheerful. Even in rooms where the sunshine never penetrated she had managed to create the effect of brilliant light. Cheap but carefully chosen cretonnes, a mute though gay-colored bird and a rug of dull blue made her living-room almost beautiful in its simple way.

Theresa was frankly ashamed of her home-making proclivities. A girl in this day and age had no right to know how to make a dollar stretch. She ought not know how to sew. Sewing perhaps was all right if a girl just made georgette teddies for herself and perhaps now and then trimmed a hat. But there was something offensively peasant-like about being able to reupholster furniture. Theresa loathed the quality in herself that urged her to haggle with the Italian tradesman over the price of lettuce and potatoes. She longed for an easy unconcern about such plebeian matters. Her high, slim heels and indelible lipstick seemed ridiculous, she thought, as often she strode from a store because the article she had come for was perhaps a nickel more than she had expected it would be. In her mind's eye she saw herself heavy-thighed, huge-breasted, wearing a shawl upon her head and carrying a basket. So plainly did she see herself thus caricatured that she smoked two packs

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of cigarettes a day, drank more than was good for her, and repeated even unamusing obscene stories in an effort to prove that she was extremely smart and modern. In the matter of money Theresa could never bring herself to a pitch of recklessness. She was not niggardly. Everything that came into her home in the way of foodstuffs was of the best grade procurable and she planned her meals with a liberal hand, but that was only good sense, and she regretted that it could not be called extravagant.

So much did she hate the instincts which directed her to furnish her home so charmingly and so cheaply that she did not like visitors. She was vexed when she had to admit that she had made the curtains, the hooked rugs, the cushions, the bedspread, and the lamp shades. Compliments on her work left her cold and ungrateful. She would have preferred that they should say, "Theresa's apartment is perfectly bare and uncomfortable." But something within her kept urging another cushion here, a bit of embroidery there; so Theresa saw herself dull, domesticated, plodding, when she longed to be light-minded and devoid of any housewifely traits.

It was with annoyance that Theresa saw Lillian's roadster roll up to her door one morning late in September. She was washing her white window sills when she caught sight of the car and wondered why people couldn't use their telephones and find out whether or not one was anxious to play hostess. She liked Lillian, was even fond of her, but her work had to be done, and she knew Lillian was especially adept at making jokes about people who actually cleaned their houses.

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Theresa opened the door for her unexpected guest. "Lo," said Lillian. She eyed Theresa amusedly. "You're not working, are you?" Theresa still carried a wet cloth in her hand.

"Yes, I'll be done soon. Come in and sit down."

"I thought maybe you could go to lunch with me."

"No, Lillian, I couldn't. But come on in. I've got stuff and we could have a little lunch here. How's everything?"

"Swell."

Lillian came in and seated herself. Theresa returned to the business of window sills.

"Gee, you're ambitious," Lillian remarked. "I wash my dishes and make my bed and that's that. How do you get so ambitious?"

"I don't like dirt," Theresa explained.

"I get the janitor's wife up once a week to clean for me," Lillian went on.

"I've had people in a couple of times but they don't suit me." Theresa frowned and rubbed vigorously at a stubborn stain on the woodwork.

"You were raised wrong," Lillian laughed. "Life's too short to waste your time worrying over a little dirt."

She lit a cigarette and rocked back and forth contentedly. Theresa finished the window sills and with another cloth rubbed the windows and the mirror.

"You make me feel tired just watching you," Lillian said. "I'm up too early this morning anyhow."

"What got you up?"

"Oh, Hubert had to go see Helen today." A cloud appeared on Lillian's face and settled there.

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"So you're alone?" Theresa encouraged. It was evident that Lillian wanted to talk about it. She need not have brought the subject up otherwise.

"Yes, I'm alone." Lillian sighed and an unbroken silence followed, during which Theresa dusted the picture frames. She did not care to speak first, for if she spoke of Hubert, Lillian might think her pressing, and a different topic might seem as though she were indifferent to her visitor's mood. After a time Lillian proceeded. "I get the heebie-jeebies when he leaves me alone and I run all over town looking for somebody to play with me. I never tried you before because you're different, you know. The rest of us are all kind of crazy but you're settled and sensible and I felt like being with you today. I hope you don't mind."

"No, not at all."

"You will come to lunch with me, won't you?"

"Oh, I would but I have a lot of things in the house that we could eat if you didn't mind left-overs."

"I love left-overs, honest to God I do. I never have any, though."

"How's that?"

"I don't know. What do you mean by left-overs, Theresa? Sliced meats?"

"Not necessarily. I fix creamed chicken or shepherd's pie or hash or rice à la creole, depending on what I've got."

"I don't know what shepherd's pie or rice à la creole is made from, but I never have enough chicken left to cream."

"Oh, you put green peppers with it and things like

KEPT WOMAN

that if you're a little short of meat. It's tasty. Rice à la creole is chopped ham, rice, and tomatoes baked together, and shepherd's pie is chopped lamb and mashed potatoes baked and—" Theresa dropped her dust-rag suddenly and threw herself on the couch. "What's the use of cleaning or talking about cooking?" she asked. "I'm not interested in that sort of thing and neither are you."

Lillian laughed. "We were pretending that we were housewives," she said. "You weren't pretending, though. You're a wow at cooking and cleaning and sewing and all that sort of thing. I wish I was."

Theresa reached over to the smoking-table and got herself a cigarette. "Say, did you hear that story of Anna's about the Scotchman carrying the anvil?"

"Yes, isn't that a wow?"

"I thought it was funny."

"I told it to Louise, but she didn't know what an anvil was. Can you beat that? It's sort of a hammer, isn't it, Theresa?"

"Well, sort of. Of course most times it's the thing that the hammer hits. You know blacksmiths use them to shape horseshoes on."

"Yes, that's what I thought. Louise is kind of thick."

Theresa glanced at the clock and went to the kitchen. "Want to come watch?" she asked. "I'm going to fix lunch. It's going on twelve."

"Gee, I just had breakfast."

"Well, that's your tough luck. Twelve is lunch-hour. You should have gotten up earlier if you were going to snoop around for lunch dates."

KEPT WOMAN

It was an hour later, when the two girls had returned to Theresa's living-room, that Lillian turned once more to the subject of Hubert.

"He and I are honestly having a gorgeous time," she said. Her tone was cheerful but the cloud still lingered on her face. "I don't think I really made a mistake in giving up my job, Theresa."

"No?"

"No, do you now?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Oh, I have no right to butt in on other people's business, Lillian. I'd sooner not start talking to you about this."

"But I've asked you."

Theresa looked at her sharply for a moment and decided that Lillian didn't ask everybody about her personal affairs. "I think it's wrong," she said, "to be idle. I don't mean that in a Sunday-schoolish way, Lillian. I just mean that you enjoy things more if you're working and there's a line drawn between your work and your pleasures. You get kind of foggy if you have no set hours for doing things, and that's not right for your mind or your liver. Then there's another reason, too."

"What's that?"

"Suppose Hubert should leave you? What would you do?"

"He wouldn't leave me."

"If he did, what would you do?" Theresa pursued relentlessly.

KEPT WOMAN

"Go to work."

"Sure. And there's the rub. It's hell to go back to a routine once you're out of it. Early rising and subway pushes and taking orders are lousy once you're out of the habit of them. And as far as getting another man goes—well, you know, Lillian, ones with money don't grow on trees."

"I don't want another one after Hubert."

"Why? Are you crazy about him?"

Lillian laughed. "Gee," she said, "that's a funny question people always ask. I didn't expect it from you. It's a kind of laziness that makes you ask it. If I said yes or if I said no then you wouldn't have to find out for yourself. I don't like to say whether I am or not. I'm superstitious about it. You watch close and you'll see plenty that'll give you the answer."

"You're like a kid, Lillian, honest you are. I don't care whether you picked Hubert for his bank roll or not. I'm thinking of you, not of him. Your side of the matter, not his."

"Don't you like him?"

Theresa smiled slowly. "I don't know," she said hesitantly. "There's nothing about him that's especially nice or nasty as far as I can see. He's been good to you and that's all right, but the Fishers and other people have no call on his check-book and I think that there he's been an awful sap."

"That's been my fault, Theresa."

"Go on. You couldn't have got him to sling money around if he didn't just love doing it. He's got a certain amount of brains though, Lillian, or maybe it's instinct."

KEPT WOMAN

I think you'd have a hard time fooling him, but he could fool you, Lillian, if he wanted to."

"Well, we don't fool each other."

"That's good."

"He's naturally generous, Theresa. Honest, you'll find that out if you ever need him."

"We get along all right. Thank you," said Theresa.

"Oh, I didn't mean that you ever would need him, but, you know, in case. You were dead right when you said he loves slinging money around. He's as big-hearted as anybody living."

"I don't know about Hubert, Lillian, but there are some people who give because they get a kick out of being kind. You know, they like—"

"That's Hubert," Lillian insisted, brightly. "He gets the biggest kick in the world out of doing favors for people."

Theresa forsook that angle of the situation. She didn't have the time, the words, or the hardness of heart necessary to enlightening Lillian. "Well, you're happy anyway?"

"Oh, I suppose so. What the hell. I got more than I ever had in my life before."

"You don't sound cheerful. What's the matter?"

"Louise is sorry for me." Lillian spoke without having intended to. She felt ridiculous after having worded the thing which had rankled in her heart for a month.

"Why is she sorry for you?"

"Because I'm not married to Hubert."

KEPT WOMAN

"Is she sorry for every woman in the world except Hubert's wife?" Theresa asked.

"Oh, you know what I mean. She pities me for not being respectable and sure of Hubert and all that."

"Oh. That makes you dissatisfied, huh? Have you spoken to him about it?"

"Sure. He asked Helen for a divorce because I felt so rotten after Louise said that."

"What did she say?"

"Who? Louise?"

"No. Helen Scott."

"Oh, she made a terrible scene. Was going to kill herself. She wouldn't divorce him. I felt sorry when I heard about it. She's old, you know, and white-haired and fearfully jealous. Gee, you know Helen seems a lot older than Hubert and set in her way and uninteresting. She worries a lot about him. Probably tells him to put his rubbers on when it's raining and that sort of thing. You know what she did? Last night when he called her up she told him to be sure and have the brakes fixed on his Packard before he went up there to-day. She's always thinking of something happening to him. Gee, I wouldn't take a man away from a woman like that even if I could."

"But you're unhappy."

"Oh, well, it's just that I'm nobody. See what I mean? I'm not a wife or a widow or a divorced woman or a bum or anything. I'm not a sweetheart. That means a young girl who's holding out for the wedding bells, don't it? I'm nothing. There's no name for what I am."

KEPT WOMAN

Theresa looked at Lillian and smiled. "Yes, there is," she said, quietly.

"What is it?"

"Kept woman."

"Oh, I never—"

"You never heard that expression?"

"Yes, but I never thought that I—I just never—"

Theresa reached out and caught Lillian's hand. She squeezed it gently. "I'm sorry, Lillian," she said. "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. I thought you and I were hard-boiled enough to say whatever came into our minds when we were together."

"You didn't hurt me. I just had never thought of that when I was trying to find a name for myself. No, you didn't hurt me."

Theresa was gazing spell-bound into the face of her friend. The worry cloud had disappeared and there was rather a pleased but self-conscious smile on Lillian's lips.

"Funny I never thought of that," Lillian said. "Of course I'm a kept woman." The little self-conscious grin broadened as she spoke the words.

Theresa stared at her unbelievably. She was as pleased as a growing girl who has been mistaken for an adult. "Well, I'm glad you're not hurt, Lillian," she said at length.

"Oh, no, I'm not hurt. Don't be silly. I'm just surprised that I never thought of that myself. Of course I'm a kept woman." The delighted little grin again.

Later while Theresa was getting dinner for Hymie

KEPT WOMAN

and pondering on the curious satisfaction Lillian had found in applying a vulgar term to herself, Lillian sat in her apartment thinking about that same term.

It did not sound vulgar to her. She said it aloud several times and derived a new pleasure at each repetition. The two words were fraught with a wild beauty for her.

They spoke of a spirit brave and rebellious. Anybody could marry. The most brainless, timid wretch imaginable could marry, but it took a rare courage, a woman big enough to scoff at conventions, to be what she was. There was, too, an unorthodox glory in the words, a suggestion of pagan merriment and open sin. The word "wife" sounded flat and lifeless as compared with those two golden words and what they suggested to her. She was glad to be an outlaw. Who couldn't be happy when their lives were all neatly arranged for them by church and court? She was different, a great and fearless spirit.

Lillian Cory translated her thoughts into words and said to the yellow vase on the gate-leg table, "Kept woman. Sounds peppy and like a person who had guts and wasn't all cut and dried. I'm glad nobody ever married me. I really am."

The bell rang and Lillian ran to the door. It was Anna Leitz with her new boy friend, Mr. Clifford Sullivan.

Anna said, "Mr. Sullivan, meet Miss Cory."

Mr. Sullivan said, "Pleased to meetcha."

Miss Cory said, "You're welcome if you're not too

KEPT WOMAN

proper and would like to come in. I suppose Anna's told you about me being a kept woman."

Mr. Sullivan stared like one demented. It was very stimulating to a girl who didn't usually get more than a passing glance from a stranger.

CHAPTER TWELVE

CLIFFORD SULLIVAN was small in stature and exceedingly slim. He believed that plus fours were becoming to him and he always wore them on Sundays during the summer. In winter he chose for himself a long, bulky overcoat and was convinced that it made a tall and strapping man of him. His face was thin and almost aesthetic in appearance. A strangely intellectual face, totally unrelated to the mind that functioned behind it. He had always planned to marry when he was forty. That seemed to him an ideal age. He would certainly have money by then and he would build a home perhaps in Kew Gardens. It would have sunken tubs, a garbage incinerator, and a bathroom done in black and gold. His bride would be beautiful and preferably the daughter of a man who had lost his fortune in Wall Street. She would thus be fitted for the position of being a rich man's wife and yet completely dependent upon him financially.

It was a nice dream. In fact so nice that it must have taken courage to lay it aside when at the age of twenty-five, Clifford married Anna Leitz and they went to live in a two-room-and-kitchenette arrangement on Nagle Avenue.

They married without having announced their inten-

KEPT WOMAN

tions. It was Anna's idea that their marriage should be a complete surprise to her friends. Perhaps it was a desire for romance that made her so eager to just slip away to City Hall with Clifford one fine morning. Then again perhaps she did not completely trust her friends and their never silent tongues.

They came directly to Lillian after the ceremony and proudly exhibited their marriage certificate. Lillian was obligingly astounded. They laughed at her surprise and she laughed at their secretiveness and everybody was happy.

But later when Clifford had run to the delicatessen store to get some sandwiches so they could celebrate Anna turned solemn eyes upon Lillian and demanded, "Did you ever tell Billy and Louise about me?"

"About you?"

"Yes, you know. When I was sick here that time."

"Oh." Lillian laughed a little. "Certainly I did."

"No kidding, Lillian, did you?"

"Don't be a jackass. What should I tell them for?"

"Well, did they suspect?"

"I guess maybe they did."

"But they weren't sure? They didn't have anything to be positive about?"

"Not unless *you* told them."

"Of course I didn't. You don't think Hubert did, do you?"

"He wouldn't, Anna. Don't be crazy."

"You see Clifford doesn't—I wouldn't dare—I know you wouldn't say anything—I was kind of worried about the Fishers."

KEPT WOMAN

"Oh, boloney. Don't make a molehill out of a mountain."

"But, look, Lillian, it's easy for you to joke about it."

"Come on, we'll make coffee." Such moments were not to Lillian's taste. She hated to see hopes and fears suddenly plucked from their rightful seclusion and made to stand naked and shivering on display. She had always hated those intimate moments and of late her hatred had increased, for they reminded her now of the night when she had sent Hubert home to ask Helen for release. People were fools. She went to the kitchen and made the percolator ready. Anna would be herself again if she were left alone for a while.

Clifford came back with sandwiches and a cake.

"Was it all right at the store?" Lillian asked him.

"Would he let you charge it to me?"

"Sure."

"I was thinking I ought to have called him up and told him it was O.K."

"No, it was all right."

The Sullivans and Lillian sat down to their little repast. Lillian was in a friendly and merry humor. It was her way of promising Anna that everything would be all right. Anna was slightly preoccupied and disturbed. Lillian wished she had been able to pat her affectionately and say, "Wild horses couldn't drag your secret from me." That might have been pretty and certainly reassuring, but Lillian knew that she wouldn't have been able to say it without laughing, and that would probably have added to Anna's distress and doubt.

The Sullivans had their pleasant little surprise game

KEPT WOMAN

to play all over again when Hubert came in. Once more everybody laughed and shook hands and Hubert kissed the bride and asked her what she wanted for a wedding present.

"I got to see the certificate though," he laughed pleasantly. "Gee, how do I know you ain't just sticking your friends for wedding presents."

"I'm not that kind of a girl," Anna laughed back at him. Then her laughter died and she held her breath, fearful of what he might unthinkingly reply.

"She's the kind of a girl who wants something nice for a present," Lillian chattered blithely. She had seen Anna's sudden stark fear and had shared it. Hubert was loyal but forgetful and blundering.

The Fishers dropped in. Not exactly unexpectedly, but without having mentioned their intentions. It wasn't possible for the Fishers to drop in unexpectedly, as Lillian was always fairly certain that they were on their way to her house if they were not already there.

Lillian bore Louise no ill will. Anything unpleasant was better forgotten, and Louise was a good kid. She didn't mean any harm. Just dumb. It wasn't a girl's fault if she was dumb. Hubert had not so easily forgiven Louise for interfering in his business, but Lillian had convinced him that Louise had meant well.

During the days when Louise's fate hung in the balance and there was a chance that Hubert would never be friendly toward her again Lillian wondered about new friends. How did you make new friends if you weren't working? Gee, you just couldn't talk to people in the street. Anna and Louise she had met in the store,

KEPT WOMAN

and other people whom she knew were originally friends of theirs. Hubert she had met through May McCloud, whom she also had known in the store. If she lost these friends she'd never get any more. The source of supply had been removed. The thought frightened her. Friends were good to have and she hadn't so many that she could afford to lose two. It had been with open arms that Lillian had welcomed the Fishers back.

Anna seemed doubtful about telling Billy and Louise the news. Lillian told them.

Billy said "Congratulations" in a flat indifferent tone, but Louise kissed both the Sullivans and took the matter quite to heart. Anna resented her warm interest. It was too sweet, she thought, and gloomily reflected that Louise might just as well have said, "Well, well, well, so Anna's got a husband. Isn't that gorgeous. I'm so glad for poor Anna."

Hubert went out and got a bottle of gin from somewhere. Later he went out and got another bottle of gin. Lillian didn't drink much. She was handling Anna's wedding night very carefully. Louise and Anna had been known to wrangle when in their cups, and tonight even a small exchange of angry words between them might prove disastrous.

It was after midnight when Louise asked Anna where she was going to live now. Anna didn't know. The apartment on Nagle Avenue had not yet been found. They began to talk then of apartment layouts. Louise liked kitchens directly next to the living-room. Anna favored the little hall between them.

KEPT WOMAN

"I like this apartment," said Anna.

"God knows you do," Louise replied. "You're nearly always here."

"I'm not here as often as you are."

"You lived here once for a week."

"I never was here for a week. I was here three days once."

"Yes, when you had grippe." Louise pronounced the word "grippe" in a tone which would have set any one wondering.

Lillian and Clifford, who had been talking quietly together, broke off their conversation and turned toward the girls. Louise was looking bold and very well pleased with herself. She was terribly drunk. Anna, more in possession of her wits, was looking puzzled and amused.

"She seems to be sore because I stayed here, Lillian," Anna explained. Her voice was even but her cheeks were flushed, and she had knocked her glass over on the sofa without noticing it.

"Gee whiz, a fight on Anna's wedding day," Lillian said. "Aren't you ashamed, Louise?"

Seeing that Louise was about to answer, Lillian hurried on: "I'm awfully flattered that you two girls like me so much that you're always arguing who spends the most time here. Honest, Louise, Anna wasn't just faking that she had grippe in order to stick around. She really was sick that time. You know you're welcome, Lou, to spend as much time as you like here, too. Now look, the newly married couple—gee, that sounds like a newspaper announcement—anyhow they've got no little nest to go to tonight; so I suggest they have this

KEPT WOMAN

apartment. Hubert and I will go somewhere else. Come on, let's clear out now. We'll get our things right away—" Lillian grabbed Louise's arm and led her toward the bedroom, where the coats and hats were. "Come on, Billy, you too. We must all get out and leave the love-birds alone."

Before they knew it the Fishers and Hubert were standing down on the pavement with Lillian.

Billy was upbraiding his wife. "Why the hell must you always fight wherever you go? It's a damn good thing you're not a man, you'd have the daylights punched out of you every time you opened your trap. As it is, you're going to pick the wrong dame some day and she'll beat the hell out of you. I've got a good mind to take a crack at you myself."

"I'll talk as much as I please and I won't ask your permission either. What are you sticking up for Anna for anyhow?"

"I'm not sticking up for anybody. I'm just telling you what I think of you."

"You needn't bother."

"Oh, I know I'm just wasting my breath. You're too damn dumb to be anything but what you are."

"If I was smart I wouldn't have married you."

"If I was smart you wouldn't have."

"Oh, is that so?"

"Yeh, that's so."

A window opened on the ground floor of the building and a man looked out at them. "Shut up, will you? You're waking everybody up," he said.

"Go stick your head in the river," Billy answered.

KEPT WOMAN

Hubert smiled up at his neighbor. "Don't mind them," he said. "They've had a little too much to drink. I'm taking them home."

"You'd better or I'll call a cop." The man angrily slammed the window shut. He was not impressed by Hubert's friendly smile and assurance.

Lillian tucked her arm under Billy's and led him toward the garage. Hubert followed in back with Louise. The idea was to separate the two and beguile them with meaningless pleasantries. The plan, however, was a fiasco, as Louise and Billy now had to shout at each other, and to Hubert and Lillian the garage seemed very far away.

When the Fishers had been left safely behind in their own vestibule Hubert asked, "Where now?"

"I don't know," Lillian returned. "When I spoke up in the apartment I really meant to give Anna and Cliff the place for the night. I thought you and I could go to a hotel, but it don't seem so simple now. It's a question of what hotel, and we haven't any baggage. I was thinking we could go back and sleep on the couch. Do you think they'd mind?"

"Oh, I don't suppose so. They're good kids."

"Well, we'll go back then. We'll be quiet about it. Don't let the couch bang when you open it."

"I won't."

"And listen, I wanted to talk to you about something. It's about Anna. Cliff don't know about Fred. Be careful not to mention anything about him, will you?"

"Say, what do you take me for?"

"Oh, I know you wouldn't say anything on purpose,

KEPT WOMAN

but I mean, be careful that you don't let anything slip. I was scared of that tonight with Louise. She can be awfully mean when she wants to be."

"Gee, I should think Anna would be worried all the time from now on that somebody would spill something about it. It's kind of a dirty trick, too, on Cliff, I think, don't you?"

"No, I don't see why it is."

"Well, gosh, I don't know. It seems kind of dirty to me."

"Why should she tell him if she don't want to? No woman ever tips a guy off before she marries him that she has a rotten temper. And that's a lot more trouble than having another boy friend."

Lillian fell quiet then. The idea that she had just voiced struck her as being strange indeed. Of course a girl ought to tell her husband about her past; still, that spiel about the rotten temper did make sense. She decided that her eagerness to protect Anna had invented that queer thought and she tried then to dismiss it, but she felt uncomfortable. She always hated to find herself saying things that Louise and the other girls wouldn't say. It always made people think you were funny. And a rotten temper did make more trouble than an ex-boy friend, though there weren't any rules about it. It was all very confusing.

Hubert broke in on her thoughts. "Don't worry about Fred and Anna as far as I'm concerned. I'll keep quiet."

"Oh, I know you wouldn't blab to be mean or anything. I just thought maybe you'd let something slip about it."

KEPT WOMAN

"No, I'll be careful."

Hubert and Lillian spent the night on the couch with their heads pillowed upon the small, cretonne-covered cushions. They weren't bad little cushions but you got a stiff neck from trying to stay up on them.

The next day Lillian found that a precedent had been successfully established. The Sullivans had spent the night in her apartment and believed that it could be done again. Lillian knew well that it could be done again. She had never learned how to refuse. It seemed that Anna's mother hadn't room for both Anna and Cliff and they couldn't bear to be separated. A hotel was out of the question, as the Sullivan funds were low, and it would be Sunday before Anna would get a chance to hunt for an apartment.

"Certainly," said Lillian. "Stay as long as you like." The poor kids. After all, they did have to have some place to go.

Anna was generous about it, however. It was she who insisted that the couch would do perfectly well for herself and Cliff and that Lillian and Hubert must take the bed. Lillian appreciated her thoughtfulness. She went out and bought two real bed pillows for the couch and another blanket. She and Hubert had been a bit chilly.

On Sunday Anna and Lillian found the apartment on Nagle Avenue. It was forty-five dollars a month. Anna couldn't go a cent over forty; so she stood in the center of the sunny living-room and cried a little bit. This was just what she wanted, but oh, she couldn't manage it. Forty dollars was absolutely her outside price.

KEPT WOMAN

"Quit weeping, willow," Lillian said. She liked to say that and "good morning, glory."

"Oh, you'd weep, too. Here's just the kind of place I dreamed of. Look how cute the kitchenette is. Those big doors across it make it look just like a wardrobe."

"Great for cockroaches, too," Lillian added.

"I won't have roaches. I'll keep after them all the time. I'd put the cutest curtains there— Oh, look, Lillian, it has a place for dishes and everything."

"Take it," Lillian said shortly.

"But I can't pay forty-five dollars."

"Can you pay forty?"

"Yes, we can pay forty."

"All right. Take it."

"But where will the extra five come from?" Anna had a fair idea now where the extra five would come from, but she wanted Lillian to be explicit.

"Don't worry. Take the apartment, will you? I can't stand here all day."

Anna took the apartment and moved in three days later, staying home from work one morning to do so. The living-room and bedroom were furnished on the installment plan. Lillian bought the curtains and the kitchenette essentials. Hubert gave Clifford sixty dollars to cover the extra five dollars on his rent for a year.

"That will be your wedding present," he said. Clifford and Anna looked a little disappointed, he thought; so he bought them a carving-set. Anna wondered what she would do with it, but she was very appreciative. After all, it takes a man of rare imagination to present a kitchenette-user with a carving-set.

KEPT WOMAN

Lillian felt relieved when the Sullivans settled in their own place. They had made a terrible lot of noise in the mornings fixing their breakfast and Anna had washed Clifford's shirts one night and hung them up in the kitchen to dry. Lillian didn't mind silk underwear daintily spread upon a line but the sight of heavy pieces drying in a kitchen brought unpleasant recollections of her childhood. The old lady at the tub. The house smelling of yellow soap. Rainy days and the kitchen strange and damp with shapeless white phantoms hanging from up near the ceiling.

The Sullivans had no housewarming. Lillian had planned to give them a surprise party during their first week in the apartment, but Anna had changed Lillian's mind.

"I'm not going to have any parties," Anna said, patting with a loving hand the covering of her big chair. "Look at the way people have your apartment. Holes in the rug and stains and everything. Not for me."

Lillian had the party at her house instead.

The Fishers and the Sullivans when mixed together became a great problem for Lillian. Billy and Cliff never argued but they complained to Lillian about each other continually. Cliff thought Billy was too fresh to Hubert and Lillian and should be "taken down a peg." Billy thought Cliff was full of hot air and was only trying to get something out of Scotty with his willingness to run errands. Anna and Louise wrangled continually and once Louise slapped Lillian for interfering.

KEPT WOMAN

She had been drinking, though, so Lillian didn't hold it against her.

When the Fishers had gone that night Anna said that if she were Lillian she would never have Louise in her house again. Hymie Moss had enlarged on Anna's speech.

"If I were Lillian," he had said, "I'd never have any of us in my house again."

But Lillian was Lillian and they all met many, many more times in her apartment and each evening started out with Anna and Louise chatting pleasantly together.

Anna kept her job at the store and the Sullivans were able to meet their installment collections and their rent with ease. When they were a trifle short Hubert was willing to help; so Anna was proud to say that things were going very well indeed.

When winter came upon Inwood, Lillian gave Anna her last year's coat. It was blue velvet with fur trimming. Anna said that Cliff would have a fit about her wearing second-hand clothes but she didn't care, she liked the coat and she'd take it anyway. Cliff didn't have a fit. He said that it looked very well on Anna and that he didn't know what she would have done without it.

One night Lillian and Hubert escaped from the crowd and went downtown to see a show. It had been Lillian's suggestion. On the way home Hubert laughed and said, "Say, you know what? We've been together just one year today."

"You big stiff, did you just remember that?"

KEPT WOMAN

"Sure, did you know it?"

"Of course. What do you think I wanted to dodge the bunch for? I thought we ought to be alone."

"Gee, Lil, why didn't you say something about it sooner? I'd have bought you something. You know, some little present or something."

"Oh, that's all right."

She was not disturbed at his forgetfulness. The comic strips had taught her that men never remember anniversaries.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

LILLIAN was making out her Christmas list. Mary Jackson, her baby, Theresa, Hymie, Louise, Billy, Anna, Clifford, Hubert, too, of course, but she wouldn't put him on the list because he might look it over and see that she was planning to get him a bathrobe. He was sitting across the room from her, listening to the radio. She glanced over at him and wondered for the millionth time how he found comfort in that strange position of his. Always when he listened to the radio he sat with his body describing a straight line from his heels to the back of his neck. His bottom touched the edge of the chair in a most casual manner and his hands folded behind his head just where the top of the chair-back lent a trifling support. She looked away from him and back at the list.

Well, stockings were all right for Mary. They were useful but not insultingly so. She could give her six pairs in different shades. The baby was easy. No need to worry about his gift now. Woolly dogs and rubber lions and things like that were always displayed in the stores and she could choose one when she got there. Theresa was a bit of a problem. You couldn't give her underwear or anything like that because she sewed so darn well that nothing you could buy would be good enough for her. Maybe perfume or a handbag.

Lillian wrote both perfume and handbag beside

KEPT WOMAN

Theresa's name with a question-mark after each. She'd buy Hymie a pocket lighter. That would be nice. Now Louise. What could she get Louise? Underwear would be all right for her. Two teddies and maybe a slip also. She'd get Billy a cigarette case. Anna next. She knew that Anna wanted a set of lace covers for her bedroom suite, but she hated to give anything like that. It seemed such a waste to give a girl anything for her home. Well, maybe she'd give Anna underwear too. It was best anyhow to buy Anna and Louise the same things. And she'd give Cliff a cigarette case too. That seemed all right. Now was there any one else to whom she really ought to give something?

Hubert switched off the set suddenly and stood up. "They've got an opera on," he said peevishly.

"On all the stations?" Lillian asked.

"No, but the other ones are just as bad. Their idea of entertainment gives me a pain. What are you doing?"

"Making out my Christmas list."

"Christmas list!" His tone implied that he had never heard of such madness.

"Sure. It's the fourth of December or maybe the fifth. Somewhere around that anyhow. Gee, Theresa's all finished with her shopping and Louise started already."

Hubert came over and stood beside her, looking down at the back of a milk bill upon which Lillian had been writing.

"Say," he said, "you didn't give Billy and Hymie anything last year and you didn't know Cliff. How come you've got them all on the list?"

KEPT WOMAN

"Well, I thought it would be nice to give them something, don't you?"

"I think it's kind of foolish."

"Why?"

"Oh, Christmas is a lot of bunk anyhow. It's for women and children. The department stores get fat on it and that's all it's good for."

Lillian said nothing nor did she cross the men's names off the list. She sat tapping her pencil against the arm of the couch while Hubert re-read the list.

"Is Mary Jackson going to open a stocking store?" he asked.

"Why?"

"You got six pairs of stockings down for her. Gee, two are enough."

"It's cheap-looking to only give her two pairs."

"I don't know. Helen's got a friend, a Mrs. Winters, who's worth a hell of a lot of money, and she gave Helen two pairs of stockings for Christmas one year."

"Maybe she's stingy," Lillian suggested.

Hubert shook his head. "No, I don't think she is. She gave our kid a wrist watch the year he graduated that I bet cost her fifty or sixty bucks. I don't think two pairs of stockings look cheap."

Lillian's lips curved into an expression of annoyance. She crossed out the generous six she had written and inscribed above it a cramped little two.

"You got enough underwear down for Anna and Louise, too," Hubert proceeded. "Gee, you must think we're in the silk business."

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"Now don't tell me I can give a girl less than two pieces of underwear," Lillian said.

"I seen the time when Mrs. Winters gave Helen one combination or teddy or whatever the heck you call it."

"Now you've rung Mrs. Winters in once too often on my Christmas list." Lillian looked up at him with displeasure. "What's all this about anyhow? Don't you want me to give any Christmas presents?"

"Sure, I don't care, but I think you're overdoing it. We haven't any silkworms spinning cocoons for us nor any cigarette case factory."

"Why, Hubert, I never knew you to be like this before. Don't you like the crowd any more?"

"Certainly I do. Give them presents if you want, but, hell, don't forget we've been giving them presents all year."

He walked away from her then and she could hear him in the bedroom switching on the light and looking through the closet for his slippers.

Gee, he was acting funny. It wasn't that he was stingy. A fellow just couldn't become stingy overnight. Lillian thought the matter over for a minute or two and found a solution which pleased her. Hubert was a great man. He knew when it was time to discontinue the generous hand-outs. For just so long he had been willing to play the helping hand and believed that now he had done enough. He wanted her to imply with modest gifts that he had given up the Santa Claus business. He was the kind of man who knew how and when to retreat gracefully. That took character and clear

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figuring. She had never guessed that though he appeared to distribute favors loosely, in reality he had carefully kept count. He had probably set aside a certain amount to squander on these friends of hers and it was now used up. She felt sorry for the Fishers and the Sullivans, but after all, Hubert had been as generous as one could reasonably expect. She felt proud of him and very meek as she revised her Christmas list. When he came shuffling back to the living-room in his brown felt slippers she smiled at him like an adoring but chastened wife. The ways of rich men are inexplicable at times and perhaps a little cruel, but one must accept them.

The new list omitted Hymie, Billy, and Clifford. Really it wasn't necessary to give them presents. It provided two pairs of stockings for Mary, one teddy for Anna, and one teddy for Louise. Theresa was definitely set to receive a handbag, and Mary's baby was slated for one woolly dog. Alternative choices looked a bit extravagant, Lillian thought. She wanted Hubert to see that she had grasped his meaning at once.

She did all her Christmas shopping on Dyckman Street. Twenty dollars covered everything but Hubert's gift. It cost her another ten dollars for his bathrobe. She hoped he would like it. It was red and gray and looked very warm. She had bought everything out of her monthly allowance. Hubert would return what she had spent on gifts. All of course except the ten dollars for the bathrobe. She wanted that to come out of her own money.

Christmas Eve was very gay. Lillian had a tiny tree.

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The radio set was temporarily dispossessed so that the tree could stand on its table. It didn't take long to trim the little tree, but it was fun just the same. Hubert was satisfyingly enthusiastic about the bathrobe and he gave Lillian a bottle of perfume, a cigarette holder, and an enormous box of candy.

The Sullivans came over, bringing a bath-mat which was to Hubert and Lillian with best Christmas wishes from Anna and Cliff. The Fishers brought a half-dozen Victrola records with Christmas greetings. Theresa and Hymie dropped in to say Merry Christmas. They brought no gift, and Theresa received the elaborately boxed present which Lillian handed her without embarrassment. The Mosses had twenty-one relatives who had to be remembered at Christmas; so they left out their friends through sheer necessity. Theresa knew perfectly well what her friends thought of her, but she couldn't bring herself to explain about the relatives.

Hymie, however, had a flask of rye with him. He was able to give everybody a drink. There were toasts all around, a few bursts of song, and many Yuletide wishes more wordy than sincere. Then the Sullivans had to go. They were expected at Anna's mother's house. The Fishers followed soon after. They were going to a party.

Hubert looked at the clock. It was half-past nine. He said to Hymie, "What are you people doing to-night?"

"We're going over to Fordham," Hymie said. "My sister has a lot of kids. I'm playing Santa Claus there at ten o'clock. We have to beat it."

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"Oh," said Hubert.

"Why?"

"See, I got to go home," Hubert explained. "It's Christmas Eve and I got to go. I thought maybe if you weren't doing anything, you know—Lillian will be all alone."

"Well, she can come with us," Theresa said. "Go ahead, Lillian, get into your things."

"No," Lillian shook her head. "Thanks just the same."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I'll read or something. I won't mind, honestly."

"Why don't you go?" Hubert urged.

"Go on. I'd fit in fine in a family gathering."

"They're all right," Theresa said. "They're regular people. They won't sing carols or pray or anything. Come on. At midnight there's a big feed and loads of fun. Come on."

Lillian shook her head. The Mosses had to go, for Hymie knew the children would be waiting and his sister worried that he was lying drunk and unconcerned somewhere.

Hubert put on his hat and coat. "Gee, Lil," he said, "I hate to do this."

"Oh, don't be silly. Beat it, will you?"

He took two packages from the table. One was the twin of Lillian's enormous box of candy. The other was a pair of fur-lined gloves.

"Good night, Hubert. Merry Christmas."

"Same to— Oh, gee, Lil, what are you going to do with yourself?"

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"Read for a while, then go to bed. I'll be all right. Don't worry about me."

"Good night, Lil. Gee, don't you think the Fishers or the Sullivans should have asked you along like Theresa did?"

"Why should they?"

"Well, the Mosses did."

"Oh, that was just a bowl of cherries. They knew I wouldn't come. People aren't little gods, Hubert. They do what's going to make things most pleasant for themselves."

"I hope you don't mean me, Lil."

"Oh, go home, you old fool. You're cluttering up my doorstep."

Hubert laughed and went out. He looked up at the living-room from the garden court and saw that Lillian had turned off the lights on the little tree. He wondered what she was doing. Gee, poor kid, all alone. He wished Helen had gone away for Christmas as she had last year.

At ten minutes past eleven the Mosses were back at Lillian's house.

"Oh," she said as she opened the door for them, "you shouldn't have."

They looked at her and then away quickly. She wouldn't like to be stared at now. Hymie threw off his coat and Theresa unwrapped a bundle of sandwiches and Christmas cakes.

"I don't suppose you have any coffee?" she said. "Hymie's sister wanted me to bring some along in case you wouldn't have, but I'm a great one for gambling."

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"Yes, I have coffee. Though it's a wonder I remembered to go to the grocer today. Gee, Theresa, it's darn nice of you to do this. It's terribly cold out, isn't it? I was just looking out the window a minute ago and I thought it looked positively freezing."

"Yeh, it's kind of cold," said Hymie.

"Well, thank God for steam heat," Lillian went on. "I was just thinking before you came how cold it use to be in our house on Christmas morning when I was a kid. We had stoves, you know, one in every room, but sometimes they weren't so good and us kids used to freeze to death looking at our toys. There wasn't a lot to look at, but you know when you're a kid Christmas seems important and you think it's a great day."

"Yeh, I know," said Theresa.

"Say, Theresa, did you sing 'Oh, Little Town of Bethlehem' in school when you were a kid? You know what I mean, around Christmas time. I was just thinking of that song a little while ago."

"Sure, we sang it."

"So did we," said Hymie.

"It goes 'Oh, little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie'—"

Lillian began to sing and the others joined her. Over the little green table in Lillian's kitchen far into the night they recalled Christmas songs and exchanged stories of long-forgotten Christmases.

When it was very late and the Mosses were sure that Lillian was very sleepy, they left her. She heard their cold motor object strenuously to such treatment but at last agree to take them home. Lillian undressed

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wearily. Funny, she thought, that the Mosses didn't give presents. Just never got the feel of the Christmas spirit, she supposed.

Hubert was back by one o'clock Christmas Day. He and Lillian took a drive, stopping for the Sullivans on their way home. It was a warmish, sunless day. Smoky-colored like autumn. Nobody was in a very good humor.

Clifford wanted a turkey dinner. Hubert wanted to go to the Italian restaurant in Fordham. Anna said it wouldn't be Christmas to her if they didn't have turkey. Hubert said he'd just as leave have spaghetti.

"Maybe they'll have turkey there today," Lillian suggested.

"No, they won't," Anna said. "They didn't have it Thanksgiving."

"But Thanksgiving is just an American holiday," Clifford reminded her. "You know, it's the day the Pilgrims landed here."

"Well," said Hubert, "we'll go to the spaghetti joint and you two can go somewhere and have turkey. How will that be?"

The Sullivans went with Hubert and Lillian and dined on antipasto, spaghetti, and spumoni. Anna said three times that it didn't seem like Christmas at all and Clifford told her not to mind, that next year they'd go to a downtown restaurant and have a swell feed. Lillian felt fearfully embarrassed. Hubert was certainly being strong in his determination not to squander money on the crowd any more.

The Fishers were waiting in the vestibule of Lillian's

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house when they got back there. They had been making calls and both were nicely plastered.

Lillian noticed at once that Anna and Louise were uncommonly chummy tonight. She attributed this strange manifestation to the Yuletide season at first.

But later in the evening Louise asked of Anna, "Did you hear from Claire Rubens today?"

Anna shook her head and frowned slightly.

"I wonder how she got home?" Louise went on.

"Home from where?" Cliff cut in with an elaborate stage delivery. "Was she somewhere unusual?"

"Why. You know, she—" Louise broke off suddenly and there was a moment's silence during which Louise and Anna flushed and Cliff and Billy whistled carelessly and searched their pockets for cigarettes.

Lillian kept her eyes fastened to the little bare spot near the door where the builders had evidently run short of wainscoting. She wished she were anywhere but in this room. She was far more embarrassed than any of the four who sat so uncomfortably grouped about her. She had no business here. They wanted to talk over the party at Anna's mother's house which clearly the Fishers had attended. Oh, why did people have to weave senselessly intricate nets of lies? Why couldn't they be square and say, "Look here, so and so's the case." Damn them for trying to spare a person's feelings and then plunging them into a position like this.

Lillian said to herself, "The hell with them." She said it many times, but it didn't seem to help.

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The silence in the little room grew unendurable. Hubert was regarding the Fishers and the Sullivans with angry eyes. At last he said, "Did you people all go out together somewhere last night?"

None of the four answered. Lillian said, "What's the matter, Hubert? We don't own them. Aren't they allowed to go out?"

"Well, I think it was a lousy trick," Hubert said. "You knew Lillian was going to be here alone."

"She wasn't alone," Anna replied.

"But you didn't know she wasn't going to be."

"Don't forget you left her alone, big boy," Billy put in.

"Oh, that's all right," Louise said in mocking tones. "He's Hubert."

"I had to go home to my mother on Christmas Eve," Anna said, "just the same as you had to go home to your wife. And I invited Billy and Louise to go with me."

"You could have taken Lillian, too, couldn't you?" Hubert challenged.

"Oh, Hubert," Lillian begged.

Cliff said, "Look, Scotty, we all know the way things stand. Anna's mother is old-fashioned, you know what I mean. She wouldn't understand about Lillian and—you."

"If it hadn't been for that I'd have asked her in a minute," Anna shouted, exultantly.

"Of course," said Billy.

"Of course," echoed Louise.

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"Well, cripes, what did she do, read about Lillian and me in the newspapers? What did you tell her about Lillian for, Anna?"

"She used to know Lillian when we worked together, see? I had to explain about you and her when Lillian started giving me so many things for the apartment."

"Oh, call it a day," said Lillian. "What the hell? I don't care whether I was invited or not. I wouldn't have gone anyhow."

Louise was sitting near Lillian now with her arm about her. She whispered, "I told Anna she should have asked you. 'After all,' I said, 'Lillian's always been a good friend to you.'"

Anna began to cry. "If it wasn't for my mother," she said, "I'd have asked Lillian. Only my mother is so old-fashioned."

"Oh, can it," ordered Lillian. "I'm telling you I don't care. I'm a kept woman and I don't care that I'm not welcome in respectable homes."

"You're as good as anybody else," Hubert blazed. "You're as good as Louise or Anna!"

Anna threw Lillian an imploring glance. Lillian was never one to let her friends down.

"You mean I'm just as good at heart, Hubert. Well, I've tried to be decent to people, but you know some of the older folks still count a girl's goodness by the number of men she's disappointed. Anna didn't mean to slight me. We're all friends. Go on, Hubert, go out and get a bottle of gin."

"I will not," he said. "I'm not going to buy gin for

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a bunch of lice that don't think you're good enough to invite out with them." He strode to the bedroom angrily and slammed the door.

It was a very impressive exit, he thought, and expedient, too. It saved him two dollars.

In the living-room the five sat silent. Anna wept very daintily into her handkerchief. The men looked pensively out the window at nothing at all. Louise and Lillian smoked.

Billy said, "Let's shove off. We're in wrong."

Lillian smiled at him pleasantly. "No," she said. "You know how Hubert is when he gets back from the family. They drive him nearly crazy. He'll be fine again tomorrow."

"I don't want no friends," said Billy, "who are fine one day and call me a louse the next."

He got his coat and Louise got hers. Billy said good night shortly. Louise kissed Lillian and assured her that she would not hold Hubert's outburst against her.

"It positively won't make any difference," she promised. "You weren't responsible for it." The Fishers went home.

The Sullivans followed as soon as Anna was able to patch up her blighted complexion. They left feeling certain that Hubert was not himself and charging Lillian to call them as soon as he was.

Lillian closed the door upon them, turned out the lights, and went to the bedroom. Hubert was in bed but not asleep.

She sat down on the edge of the bed and stroked his hand as she spoke to him.

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"I know you lit into them," she said, "because you think they handed me a raw deal and you think I mind it. I didn't, honest, Hubert. Really. They were right. I'm different. I'm a kept woman, and a girl can't bring me home to her mother's house. I'm a different breed entirely. I don't think I'm not as good, understand. I think I got more guts and more character, but so has some criminals, and you wouldn't want to cart them home. See, I'm kind of an outsider. I'm a kept woman, Hubert; once you get that through your head you'll see the whole thing."

He did not reply for a moment and she prompted him. "See?" she asked.

"You gave Anna and Louise each something last Christmas that cost twenty-five bucks. I think if you'd done that this Christmas you'd have been invited. I think they got sore at the small presents."

"Oh, no, Hubert."

"Yes, I think they did. I think that's why they passed you up."

And all night long he tossed and once he sighed. Very unusual for Hubert.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MARY JACKSON discovered one day early in January that she was going to have another baby. The discovery provoked tears and deep gloom. More money would be involved than she could afford. The uptowners, except in most extreme cases, do not avail themselves of public charities.

Mary took herself, her troubles, and little Bobby to see Lillian. After all, Mary reasoned, it wouldn't do any harm to tell a prosperous friend just how worried she was. Hubert was at home when Mary called. She had not been expected, and Hubert and Lillian were lounging about in bathrobes. It was noon and they had just finished breakfast.

Mary deposited Bobby on the floor and Lillian presented him with the top of her powder box to play with. It was red cardboard trimmed with gold and very attractive even after Bobby had sucked most of the gold off. Mary herself sat miserably on the edge of her chair. She wore a shabby, rose-colored cloche and a brown coat with a narrow fur collar. The coat was worn and almost shapeless, and Mary, to offset her garments' shortcomings, had carefully powdered her face and rouged it heavily. Even her eyelashes had been mascaraed as though she were still Mary McDonough who ran a switchboard and had no worries.

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"Take off your things," Lillian said.

Mary sighed. "I have to be getting back," she said. "I can't stay."

"Well, undo your collar. You'll catch cold."

Mary obeyed, sighing again. "Oh, I hardly care what becomes of me," she said.

"What's the matter? You and George have a fight?"

Mary smiled sadly as though Lillian had called to mind some sweet moments out of a dim past. "No," she said. "But what do you think? I'm going to have another baby."

"No kidding?"

"Yes, isn't it awful?"

Mary looked first at Lillian and then at Hubert to see if they were appreciating the full horror of her position. They looked politely sympathetic but not deeply impressed.

"I don't know what I'll do," she went on. "I can't possibly afford a confinement so soon again. The doctor and the sanitarium and extra things and all."

"Tough, all right," said Lillian.

"Not only that, but look," she pointed contemptuously at Bobby; "he's still a baby. It'll be great, taking care of two of them. And I'm not so strong. I get dizzy spells and I'm losing weight. Gee, it's awful."

"Sure is," said Lillian.

"Huh," said Hubert, "women years ago could have a dozen kids without making the fuss over it that you girls make over one or two. What do you expect when you get married?"

"Oh, go on, Hubert," Lillian said, "we're different

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today than women were years ago. They didn't have nothing to do then but have kids."

"Well, what's Mary got to do beside having kids? She ain't running a business or having a career or anything, is she? She's married, and women have to expect kids when they're married."

Mary was silent for a moment while she thought over all Hubert had said. Then she began anew.

"I love children," she said, "and I believe women ought to have lots of them if they're well enough. I don't mind caring for them, but I am so weak and sickly. Why, I'm absolutely fagged out if I do the least thing."

Hubert said, "You'll feel better in another month or two, I'll bet." He got up and stretched his arms, yawning widely. "Think I'll go get dressed, Lil."

After he had gone Mary grew more detailed on the subject of why she should not have a baby. Lillian listened thoughtfully. Had Hubert withdrawn so that she could speak to Mary in private and offer suggestions and perhaps financial aid? She'd never known him to do that. She really was sorry for Mary and certainly Hubert must be sorry too. She wished she knew whether he intended to help Mary or not. She thought it all over while Mary was speaking and decided not to commit herself. If Hubert wanted to help her they could call on Mary tomorrow and tell her so. If he didn't want to he would be sore if Lillian had promised Mary help.

Mary finished her recital, picked up her baby, and departed. It was clear that she had come merely to set certain facts before Lillian. Lillian went to the bed-

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room. Hubert was sitting in the pink chair looking at a magazine.

"She gone?" he whispered.

"Yes."

"What the hell does she think this is? A clinic?"

"Oh, I felt sorry for her, didn't you?"

"No. What the hell. Two kids isn't such a raft, you know. She ought to be willing to have two."

"But she isn't well."

"Bunk. She just doesn't want two kids to wash for."

"Gee, I kinda thought you'd help her out."

"You didn't tell her I would, did you?"

"No."

"That's good, because I'm not going to. She's no sicker than I am. She's just lazy."

Lillian didn't understand at all until she recalled that after all Mary was one of the crowd and Hubert had grown tired of doing favors for them.

He had forgiven the Sullivans and the Fishers for their treatment of Lillian. He hadn't meant to, but they had all called on New Year's Day and he found it hard to hold a grudge when they sang "For he's a jolly good fellow."

So they'd been as intimate as ever. Lillian was glad. Friends were friends in her simple calculations.

Billy was going to broadcast again. He was getting a more prominent position than he had ever had before. He was getting promoted to 11.15 A.M., and Louise said there was no standing it with the high opinion he had of himself.

"What I'm hoping," Billy explained to his friends,

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"is that some firm, you know, like Palmolive Soap or Ipana Toothpaste or Wrigley's gum, will hear me and hire me to advertise their product. You know, like the Happiness Boys advertise Happiness Candy. I could pull down a lot of money that way and the firm wouldn't be losing anything either. See, I thought for instance if a toothpaste firm took me I'd call myself Smiling Billy. See, meaning that I could smile because I wasn't ashamed of my teeth because I'd been using Whatsit Toothpaste. I thought, too, I'd use for a signing-off song 'When you come to the end of a perfect day.' See? I'd change the words around and tell them not to go to bed without brushing their teeth at the end of a perfect day. See? Gee, it would be a wow."

Anna giggled appreciatively. Billy was encouraged.

"I thought, too, that maybe if like a candy firm would hire me, I'd call myself Sweet William. See, that's a flower. And I'd use for a signing-off song 'Sweet Sixteen,' meaning the sweet sixteen ounces to a pound of their candy, see?"

"Gee, that's good," said Lillian, completely overawed at facing some one who had thought of something.

Billy executed a neat "break" with his nimble feet. "Say," he said, "I got those two ideas and a lot more too humorous to mention."

"They're clever all right," Hubert agreed.

On the strength of Hubert's applause Billy motioned him away from the others and filed an application for a little loan of fifty dollars. He was broke. The paint-selling hadn't been going so well, and besides Billy had had to take a lot of time off to get new songs from the

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publishers and to rehearse them. Fifty dollars, he said, would just help him out swell. Hubert turned him down flat. Billy reduced his appeal to twenty dollars, but Hubert was adamant. To less than twenty dollars Billy refused to stoop.

He told his story to Lillian in the kitchen, whither they two had gone to make coffee.

"Hubert has taken a fierce dislike to me," he ended up. "I guess we hadn't better come around any more."

Lillian wanted to tell him that Hubert believed that he had given away enough money, but she couldn't bring herself to do it. Billy was so like a disappointed child. She racked her brain for something that would appease him and put Hubert in a better light.

"The truth is," she whispered, feeling very delighted with her power of imagination, "Hubert is a little pressed for cash. That's it," she went on, growing positively excited over her creative genius. "He's in a bit of a hole."

"Well, what are you so happy about?" Billy asked.

"Happy?"

"Sure. You're giggling about it as though it was sweet news."

"Well, I try to be cheerful no matter what happens," she told him.

She wanted to tell Hubert about the wrong steer she had given Billy, but remembered in time that she couldn't. He would be sore at Billy for carrying the story to Lillian and he would be sore at her for not telling Billy the plain fact that he was tired of handing money out. The more she thought over the situation,

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however, the more she felt that she did have something to tell Hubert.

When they were alone that night she said to him, "Say, I saw Billy get you in a corner tonight and do a lot of sweet and low gabbing. Was he making a touch?"

"Trying to."

"How much?"

"Twenty reduced from fifty."

"Did you give it to him?"

"Sure."

"You did!" Lillian's astonishment came forth in a sharp exclamation. Who was lying? Billy or Hubert? And for what reason?

Hubert took the high, bewildered pitch of her voice to mean only one thing. She was vexed that he had loaned money to Billy after refusing to aid Mary Jackson.

"Well, to tell the truth, Lil, I didn't."

"What did you say you did for, then?"

"Oh, I don't know. Guess I was thinking of something else. What did you want to holler at me that way just now for?"

"When?" asked Lillian. She knew very well when.

"When? Why, just now when you said, 'You did!' Cripes, it sounded as though I'd just said I'd murdered somebody."

"I don't know. Maybe I was thinking of something else too. So you didn't let Billy have the money, huh? Why not?"

Hubert looked at her with a hurt expression on his

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red face. "Why not? Jeess, don't you think I've dealt out enough jack to that guy?"

"Yes and no."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, he ought to be man enough to stop begging you for money by now. But you know, you told him a long time ago that he could depend on you to help him out while he's fooling around with the radio business."

Hubert sullenly picked at the cuticle of his thumb nail.

"Gee, do I have to stake him forever?" he asked.

"Well, I thought the idea was that you were going to help him till he landed something that paid money on the radio."

"That might be when I'm in my grave."

"Of course," said Lillian, "it's none of my business. The affair is between you and Billy."

"Well, he ain't mad," Hubert said. "I just explained to him in a nice way that I thought I had given enough help now and that it was time he stood on his own feet. He saw my point and said it was fair enough."

Lillian stared at Hubert, quite unable to move her eyes from him. This was something new. A lie. Why had he lied? She thought over all that Billy had said to her and felt relieved. After all, perhaps Hubert hadn't lied to her. He had probably told Billy just what he claimed to have told him, but perhaps Billy, hoping to get the loan from Lillian, had purposely omitted Hubert's contention.

That was the way it must have been, but still she was forced to admit that Hubert was different recently.

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He was irritable frequently now and he never seemed to be having a good time any more. She asked herself if he was tired of her. Well, if he was he had only to go. But he might think that would be a dirty trick. He might stay even though he had gotten so that he couldn't bear her. She resolved to ask him and have at least that much threshed out.

"Hubert," she asked, "how'd you like to give this place up?"

"What?" he asked. His tone was uneasy and he looked at her strangely.

"What did I do? Sneak right up on your thoughts?" she asked.

"No, I was thinking of—of Billy's broadcasting ideas."

"Oh. Well, think about this for a while. How would you like to give this apartment the air?"

"Where would we go?"

"Why, you'd go to Helen and I'd go—" she made a little, fluttering gesture with her hand—"back to the handkerchiefs."

She was certain that she saw fear and a shocked surprise in his eyes. Then he didn't want her to go. Or was he dismayed that she had read his thoughts so well?

"Gee, Lil, you wouldn't do that, would you?"

"Sure. Does that make you feel better? When you're ready to say au revoir, just say it, big boy. Don't worry about me."

"Gosh, I'd never be ready to say au revoir to you. You're great, Lil. Don't leave me ever, will you?"

"Not if you want to keep me."

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"What do you mean, 'keep you'?"

"Not if you want me to stay."

"Oh. You had me worried, Lil. I thought you wanted to go."

"No, I don't, because you've acted so strange lately."

"You mean because I didn't give the money to Billy?"

"Oh, no. To hell with Billy. Only, I don't know, you haven't been yourself."

"Sure, I have."

"No, you haven't."

He came over and sat beside her on the sofa. He put his arm about her and pulled her near. She struggled a little to get away from him. Love-making was Hubert's favorite way of terminating annoying discussions.

"Stop. Let's talk this all over," she begged.

"Oh, talk is cheap and it don't mean much and now you're acting funny. You don't even want me to kiss you."

"Sure I do, but not when I'm trying to talk to you. For Heaven's sake, Hubert, let me alone and answer me—what's been the matter with you recently?"

"Now who's irritable?"

"Oh, I am, I suppose."

"Sure you are, and talking got you that way."

"It did not."

"Sure it did. Now let's be quiet for a while."

She gave up the idea of trying to talk to him. What was the use? He hadn't lied to her about Billy and he wasn't trying to separate from her. There was nothing then to worry about. Lillian lulled her doubts to sleep.

KEPT WOMAN

The day of Billy's broadcast came, and directly after it he went to see Lillian and Hubert. He put no stock in Louise's comments, and Lillian and Hubert were the only other people he knew who listened to it. Louise was with them, having been there for the program. The batteries on her set were run down.

The three were extremely enthusiastic in their praise. Even Louise thought he had put on a good fifteen minutes. Billy felt that they were all beginning to get wise to themselves and recognize real talent when they heard it.

"But I flatted a little on the ballad," he said generously.

The admiring trio pronounced him a liar. They wouldn't believe it. Him flat, they should say not.

"It was swell," Louise said. "I didn't know you had it in you, dear."

"You don't know anything," he answered crushingly.

Lillian said she would make some waffles and the others followed to the kitchen to watch her do it. She had some difficulty in locating her big agate spoon. Now where had it gone? Lost. Must have been bundled up with the garbage by mistake and sent down on the dumb-waiter.

"I'll have to get another spoon," she said. "I need a little potato knife and a coffee-strainer, too. I always forget to get those things."

"I get them in the five-and-ten-cent store," Louise said. "They're just as good and they're cheaper. I love to go through the five-and-tens, too. I get an awful kick out of it."

KEPT WOMAN

"So do I," said Lillian. "I haven't been in lately, though. And there's two now. One on Dyckman Street and one on Two Hundred and Seventh."

"I need some baby ribbon for my underwear," Louise remembered. "Let's go out after we eat and go shopping in Woolworth's."

"All right," Lillian agreed. "We'll each take a dollar and we'll need a truck to bring home what we bought."

"A dollar is all Louise will get," Billy said.

They ate and left the dishes standing on the table in the kitchen. Lillian went to the bedroom to get her hat and coat. Hubert followed her in.

"Got any money?" he asked.

"Now where would I get any money?" she returned. "A poor girl like me who hasn't had her allowance yet this month and is still waiting for twenty dollars she's owed from buying Christmas presents. When are you going to pay me, young man?"

"In the sweet bye-and-bye, kid. Here." He fumbled in his pocket and held a bill out to her. She reached for it and was placing it in her pocketbook when she noticed the denomination of it. It was a one-dollar bill.

"Isn't that what you said you and Louise would each take?" he asked. His tone was low and almost pleading.

She looked up at him and saw his eyes anxiously fixed upon her. "Yes, sure," she said. "That's all right." She stuffed the dollar in her pocket and murmured again, "Yes, sure. That's all right."

He could only spare a dollar. She walked to the foyer to join Louise. A dollar he had given her. Her heart was shaking within her in queer little hot flutters.

KEPT WOMAN

Hubert had given her a dollar. One dollar. What did that mean? She put the question to herself, fully aware that she knew the answer. Oh, see the dollar? Who has given the lady the dollar? Only in the school book it had been flower instead of dollar.

On the right as you go in there's the ribbon counter. To the left stationery. Directly in front novelty jewelry. Louise went to the right and asked Lillian's opinion on two shades of narrow pink ribbon. Lillian said the lighter shade was prettier. Louise said she preferred the darker.

Lillian said, "Then what the hell did you want to bother me about it for?"

Louise bought ribbon, a comb, and a card of hooks and eyes. She played with the idea of buying some glasses but changed her mind. They came to the counter where kitchen utensils were sold, and Louise pointed to agate spoons and gave Lillian the right of way.

"Oh, I don't think I'll bother," Lillian said.

"Why not?"

"It's so hard to get waited on."

"No, I'll get you a girl."

"Don't bother, Louise. I don't want to be annoyed with it."

"You're crazy."

"So is your old man."

On the way out Louise bought a little pocket mirror, a powder puff, a yard of elastic, and a string of green glass beads.

Lillian stood a little apart from her and took no in-

KEPT WOMAN

terest in her friend's purchases. Funny how it had all come to her in a flash when he handed her that dollar bill. Funny, too, that she hadn't guessed before. It was not like him to suggest small Christmas presents and refuse to help Mary Jackson and throw Billy down on a loan. And he'd been acting so irritable and strange. Gee, she was a nut not to have guessed the truth. Broke. She couldn't imagine it. It was easy to picture herself broke. She had been that way before. But Hubert—that was different. He liked to have money and he liked to spend it. He liked good food and long drives and buying things for people. How would he like being broke? And how had it happened? She had a vision of a fat, unprincipled Wall Street man who had crushed Hubert because he was jealous of him.

Lillian returned to the apartment with her dollar intact.

"What did you buy?" Hubert asked her.

"Nothing."

"Oh, you should have bought something."

Louise spread her bargains out upon the table for Billy to admire. "Lillian saw the five-and-ten's kitchen things and didn't think they were good enough for her."

"Oh, it wasn't that," Lillian said, quickly.

She hoped the Fishers would go soon. She wanted to talk to Hubert. But the Fishers stayed. The afternoon wore on. Billy talked about radio and Lillian sat by the window, looking down at the garden court. A woman was sunning her baby there. Wait till the janitor saw the carriage. There'd be a fight then. Women weren't allowed to sun their babies in the garden court.

KEPT WOMAN

Baby carriages were considered very unsightly. Lillian wondered how much a carriage like that cost. Not that she ever expected to buy one, but it would be nice to know. How did married women who were tied down to a certain amount of money get along? They had to buy meat and groceries and baby carriages. They seemed to get along all right, too.

The janitor emerged from the basement into his beautiful garden court. He spied the baby carriage and a wrathful cloud passed over his face. He crept nearer and looked closely at the child.

"Mrs. Levine," he bellowed.

Mrs. Levine appeared at her kitchen window. "Yes."

"You'll have to take this carriage out of the court. You know we can't have this. Suppose every woman in the building put her carriage here? How would people walk through the court?"

"Well, I'll be right out."

"You'll have to take it away now."

"Don't you say 'have to' to me. I'll take him away when I'm ready."

"You'll take him now."

"When my husband comes home he'll tell you something."

"Yeh."

The janitor walked away. Lillian watched him as he returned to his underground hiding-place.

"Let's watch," Louise said. "I want to see if Mrs. Levine will take the baby out of there."

"You can have my place," Lillian said, getting up. "I don't want to watch. Anything like that gets my goat."

KEPT WOMAN

This house is getting fine when they have arguments in the court."

"God, you're snooty," said Louise.

"No, but I don't think it's much of a place when things like that go on. I'm going to keep my eyes open for another apartment, I think."

The Fishers stayed till Lillian was forced to ask them to dinner. They talked the proposition over just as though there was a chance that they would go home. Finally they agreed to stay.

Lillian offered her dollar to Hubert and told him to get a pound and a half of chopped meat and a can of beets.

"I have money," he said, ignoring the bill. Once more Lillian tucked it away. It evidently wasn't the last dollar they had. That was some consolation.

It was midnight before Lillian and Hubert were alone again. The day had been the longest Lillian had ever known. She was anxious to find out what had happened to Hubert's fortune and what his plans and prospects were.

She saw the Fishers down the stairs and hurried back to the living-room. Hubert was yawning and taking off his shoes. "Well," he said, "I guess we might as well go to bed."

"Wait. I want to ask you something."

He looked at her questioningly, as though he hadn't the remotest notion what she would wish to discuss at this hour.

"It's about that dollar you gave me today. Was that all you could afford, Hubert? Are you short?"

KEPT WOMAN

"No. I just hadn't gotten a check cashed." He bent over his shoes and yanked violently at the laces.

"Oh, horse-radish. You're strapped, aren't you? Is that why you wouldn't lend Billy or Mary Jackson any money?"

He straightened up and said, "Well, to tell you the truth, Lil, I am just a little bit short."

"How short?"

"Well, pretty short."

"*How* short?"

"Well, I can foot another month's rent here and feed us. Oh, I got about a hundred and seventy-five dollars."

"And two cars," Lillian reminded him. "You can always sell those."

He laughed loudly and shook his head. "Don't you worry, Lil," he said. "It won't come to that. We won't have to sell the cars."

"Why not?"

"Say, what do you think I am? A cripple? Kid, I can get a job tomorrow that will keep us sitting pretty for the rest of our lives."

"What happened to your money, Hubert? Did you—did you invest it badly?" That was an intelligent question. Showed she knew something and that he could talk to her freely.

"No, I invested it swell. We spent it."

"Spent it? How much did you have? What did we spend?"

He thought a moment. "Oh, about twenty-five thousand dollars," he said carelessly.

KEPT WOMAN

"Oh, no, Hubert, honest? Did we really spend that much?"

"Sure. Don't look so sick. That ain't a terrible lot."

"It seems a terrible lot to me."

"Well, you haven't been in business. You haven't been used to large amounts like me. Sure, we spent around twenty-five thousand dollars."

Anyhow, he thought to himself, it *was* over fifteen thousand that they spent. Well over. He'd had twelve hundred dollars in his bank account when the McKay Brothers had paid him.

"I can hardly believe we spent that much," Lillian said. "It seems terrible."

"Now don't you worry about it. There'll be plenty more for us to spend. Only for a while we have to cut down, see?"

"Sure, I see. Didn't I pave the way for us today to move from this apartment without too many questions from the Fishers?"

"Well, Lil, I didn't think you did that so good. See, the way you did that, all about the baby carriage and the janitor and all, will make them think you're planning on moving to an even better apartment than this."

"Oh, I'll take care of that."

"All right. You take care of that and I'll take care of getting a job. Of course I won't be with you in the daytime then, but I've had a long enough vacation. Time I got back to doing something."

"Yes, maybe you will feel better if you are doing something. Well, I guess we might as well go to bed."

KEPT WOMAN

She was surprised to hear herself suggesting bed. But a few minutes before she had imagined that they would be up all night discussing ways and means. Now it seemed natural to dismiss the whole affair lightly. His broad shoulders and smiling face were enough assurance for her. He was the kind of man who had no patience with poverty. Within a week he would be associated with some firm and everything would be running smoothly again. Any man who could spend twenty-five thousand dollars in a little more than a year was not of the stuff who knows want. Funny how she had gotten so panicky over Hubert's little setback. Why, Lillian was willing to bet that even Henry Ford has his money worries.

She felt, though, that he ought to have told her at the beginning that his money was running low. He had caused her a great deal of needless distress by his secrecy. Although he had, of course, been trying to save her worry. Well, everything was straightened out now. She yawned and stretched happily. Nothing was bad when you knew what it was all about.

Hubert was feeling light-hearted, too. Now that Lillian knew the facts of the case things were easier. Something great would turn up right away. He wasn't worried about that. He knew his ability. But it was nice in the meantime to have somebody going over bumpy roads with a fellow. She cheered him up right away by the calm way she took things. Gee, she must believe that he was the kind of a guy who made good; otherwise she wouldn't have taken the news so easy. That cheered him up a lot. If she wasn't worried that proved he

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really seemed like the sort who cleaned up big jack. He looked at her pretty face with its red lips and black eye-lashes. She smiled at him and he felt that his future was assured. Women didn't smile that way at fellows who looked like flat tires.

"Come on," she said.

She picked up the clock, an ash tray, and a pack of cigarettes and started for the bedroom.

Hubert reached down and got his shoes from beneath the couch. He turned out the lights and followed her.

"You going to smoke in bed?" he asked her.

"Sure."

"Well, I'm going right to sleep. I'll be out early tomorrow. I'll just grab a cup of coffee. You needn't bother getting up. Just set the alarm for eight."

"Oh, sure. I'll get up and fix you waffles."

"Please don't."

"Why? What's the matter with my waffles?"

They both laughed. Hubert kissed her good night and was asleep almost as soon as he hit the pillow.

Lillian smoked her cigarette and turned out the light. She fell asleep without wasting a second on worry. It was the greatest compliment any one had ever paid Hubert.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

HUBERT and Lillian both arose briskly when the alarm went off at eight o'clock. Lillian put on a kimono and went to the kitchen to prepare breakfast for Hubert. He took a cold shower and dressed in the meanwhile. He had never taken a cold shower before in his life, but this morning it seemed the properly efficient thing to do. He ate his breakfast hurriedly and concentrated deeply on his plans. Lillian did not disturb his thoughts. She silently provided him with a second cup of coffee and solemnly kissed him good-by. She thought of saying "Good luck" to him as he went out but rejected the idea as ridiculous. To wish him luck was to question his importance and his ability.

Hubert found himself at the wheel of the Packard by ten minutes of nine. He felt very businesslike and keen. The one thing that disturbed him was that he didn't know where to go. Where did one begin when one was looking for a highly paid executive position?

He thought the situation all over and decided he was out too early. It was well known that prominent business men never get to their offices early. Well, he'd ride along and decide just where he was going.

He rode along admiring the early morning and breathing the air gleefully, and before he knew it he was in his own suburban town. Well, he'd go home and

KEPT WOMAN

change his clothes. A man was judged by his appearance.

Helen was having her breakfast. She sent Nellie to ask him if he would like some coffee. He thought that was very sweet of Helen, but he declined, saying he was in a great hurry. Nellie disappeared, returning a minute later to say that Mrs. Scott wanted to see him.

He went to the dining-room. Helen gazed up at him and inquired, "What's the matter? No telephones where you've been?"

"Gee, Helen, if you knew what I've been through. Steve Flynn's kept me on the jump every minute."

"You couldn't have spared five minutes last night to see if I wanted the car?"

"Well, I'm here early, ain't I? What more do you want? I couldn't get to a phone last night; so I broke my neck getting up here this morning to see if you needed the car."

"Why didn't you phone instead of riding all the way up here?"

"You don't want the car today, do you?"

"Yes. You don't seem to be busy; so you might as well take me up to Stamford."

"But I am rather busy, Helen, to tell you the truth."

"Well, go about your business then and leave the car here. You can use the trains for today."

She spread a golden square of toast with marmalade and helped herself to another cup of coffee from the percolator beside her. It was built like a samovar and was, of course, electrically operated. A Christmas gift from her friend, Mrs. Winters.

KEPT WOMAN

Hubert stood watching her and wondering what he should do. If he drove Helen to Stamford there was a whole day wasted. If he went looking for a job on foot he would look broke, and that was a handicap to a fellow who wanted a good job. He decided that he might just as well drive Helen to Stamford. That way he would be sure to have the car at the end of the day.

She sat in the back and kept her eyes closed throughout the ride. Once or twice he looked at her in the mirror and thought she looked quite old. Funny hat she had on. It was black felt and cut in queer-looking wings over the ears. Her white hair looked kind of pretty peeking out at the sides. Once she opened her eyes and spoke to him. "Stop at a florist's," she said.

When he found one he stopped and Helen bought some early spring flowers and laid them beside her in the back of the car.

"Your friend up here sick?" he asked her.

It was funny to speak of Wilma Lawrence as though he didn't know her name. She had been Helen's bridesmaid at their wedding. By pretending to be completely unaware of her existence he was able to forget that she had never thought him good enough for Helen.

"She has been ill in bed for over two years now," Helen told him.

"Oh, gee, that's tough," he said.

Now he would really have to go with Helen to make the call. He really ought to do it. After all, when a person's awfully sick old scores ought to be wiped out. Gee, Helen should have told him sooner that Wilma was ill. He'd have visited her before with Helen if he

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had known. He remembered that Wilma had been a great one for horses and golf and things like that. Gee, two years in bed. He'd forget anything he had against her right now and go with Helen right to her bedside and give her the old cheer-up stuff.

But at the door of Wilma's house Helen said to him, "I'll be ready to go back in about two hours." And Hubert went into the town of Stamford to kill two hours' time.

He had a sandwich and a cup of coffee. Then he telephoned Lillian to say that he would not be with her for dinner. He thought he might just as well have dinner home tonight. He hadn't seen his son in a long while.

"How is everything?" Lillian asked him.

"Fine. I'm in Stamford now, talking over a proposition with a fellow."

Might as well tell her something pleasant. No use of her worrying about things. When he finished talking to her he bought a newspaper and went back to the car.

Helen, as it later turned out, was not having dinner at home. Neither was young Hubert. Helen said he was entirely welcome to stay if he didn't mind being alone. He didn't stay.

He took a ride over to see the McKay Brothers. Arch McKay was in Canada, he was informed. Bert was over at his mother's house. Hubert went to find Bert.

Bert was having dinner, but Hubert was allowed to sit on a dainty-legged gold chair in the parlor and wait for him. The McKay family nest was an old-fashioned frame house with at least two dozen rooms. Hubert

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could not hear a sound from the far-off dining-room. He stared at the onyx clock on the mantelpiece and wondered where Helen was having dinner. Maybe right next door for all he knew. Silly to be so unaware of his own wife's doings. For all he knew—but no, not Helen. She didn't have enough life in her for that sort of thing.

Presently Bert McKay came to join him in the parlor. Bert was big and pleasant. He shook hands heartily and boomed questions at his guest. How was he? How were tricks? What was he doing? How were Mrs. Scott and the boy?

Hubert said that he and the family were fine and that he just dropped in to see how everything was going with his old friend Bert.

"Are you working at anything?" Bert asked.

"No. Why?"

"I just wondered. It just doesn't seem possible to me that a fellow could be satisfied doing nothing all day long."

"Well, to tell you the truth, Bert, I've had enough of it. I am going to do a little something if I hear of a job that I like."

Bert nodded. "Sure, a fellow can't feel right, just laying around."

"I don't suppose there's anything over at the old place for me."

Bert laughed and Hubert laughed with him. "No," said Bert. "There's no job around that place for a guy that's used to taking it easy."

KEPT WOMAN

"That's right," said Hubert. "It used to keep me on the go."

"No offense meant, Hubert, but it's busier now than it used to be. Arch is a wonder. He's worked himself to a frazzle over the place. I made him go away for a little rest."

"Running it all alone while he's gone? Want me to help you out?"

"Thanks, but this is a big family, you know. My two kid brothers are helping me."

"Oh," said Hubert. "Well, I just thought I'd drop in and see how things were going with you."

"Thanks, I'm glad you did. Come in again."

"I will, thanks. Good night, Bert."

"Good night, Scott."

Hubert was hungry and he didn't feel that he ought to spend money on a restaurant right now. Of course he'd get something to do in no time, but it gave him a funny turn when Bert McKay hadn't jumped at the chance to get him on a salary. Of course Bert was the younger brother and probably didn't have much say in the matter and probably no brains at all. Too bad Arch hadn't been there. Arch would have known what having Hubert Scott around would do for his business.

He went home and found Lillian frying bacon and eggs for dinner. She was alone and still in her kimono.

"Oh, I didn't expect you," she said. "Didn't you say you wouldn't come home for dinner?"

"Yes, but I changed my mind. The guy got around to talking terms before dinner; so I left him flat. Five

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thousand dollars a year he wanted to give me. Can you imagine that?"

"Well, don't you think it would have been all right to take it just for a while?"

"No, I'm not going to get people in the habit of thinking I'm a five-thousand-dollar-a-year man. He'll come around as soon as he sees I'm no sap. He don't worry me none."

Lillian fried bacon and eggs for Hubert and they sat down to dinner. "Say," she said, "you know what I was thinking today? When you was figuring you had rent and enough for food and all for next month you forgot the cars. That's fifty dollars for the garage, Hubert. You simply have to get rid of those cars. We can't afford to keep them and you'd get around two thousand dollars, wouldn't you, for the two of them? Even more, maybe, and that would keep us swell till something turned up that you'd like to take."

Hubert said, "We got to have cars."

"Well, we could get other ones when things started breaking right again, couldn't we? It wouldn't hurt us to walk or use trains and trolleys for a while. We're both too fat."

"We got to have cars," Hubert repeated.

"Well, how are you going to meet the garage bill?"

"He'll let me run it for a month. He knows I'm a responsible party. By that time I'll be all set."

"I'd get rid of the Packard if I were you. We could run around in the roadster. That Packard is more expensive to run. Besides it isn't so new, and when things pick up we could knock every one dead with a new one."

KEPT WOMAN

"Listen, Lil, I wouldn't get rid of the Packard. I'll tell you why: A guy's got to look like somebody if he wants people to think he *is* somebody. I can't afford to sack the Packard, see? It's my mark of prosperity. Like that guy I approached today about a job. He was impressed with me. He figured I wasn't down and out because I had the Packard. See what I mean?"

"But he didn't offer you much money," Lillian pointed out.

"Say, five thousand isn't so little. Do you know there are guys who figure themselves made when they struggle up to that amount? I'm turning it down because I don't think it's enough for *me*, but don't get the idea that it isn't much."

Lillian felt properly squelched. She drank her coffee in silence and began immediately on the dishes. Hubert went to the bedroom and got into his bathrobe and slippers. Anna had invited them over to her apartment for the evening, but Hubert had forgotten, and Lillian, seeing that he was tired, did not remind him. He fell asleep on the couch and when the Sullivans came over to see what had delayed Lillian and Hubert he did not awaken.

"I think Louise and Billy will be over," Anna said. "They'll want to tell you the news."

"Louise is going to have a baby, I suppose," Lillian said.

"No, this is good news. I oughtn't to tell you, though. They'll want to tell you themselves."

"Maybe it's just as well that you don't tell me, then," Lillian said.

KEPT WOMAN

"Billy's got a pay job on the radio," Anna said. "He's going to advertise Gittner's self-service dress shop. A half-hour once a week. He's going to get a lot of money for it, I guess."

"He can't get more than twenty-five dollars for it," Cliff said.

"Oh, go on," Anna protested. "I heard that the Happiness Boys get five hundred dollars every time they broadcast."

"Well, for God's sake, Anna, Billy isn't the Happiness Boys, is he? And Gittner's isn't the Happiness Candy chain, and Billy isn't going to be on a first-class station."

"I don't care," Anna said. "He's going to get more than twenty-five dollars for it, because Louise says she's going to get a lot of new clothes."

"Maybe he gets a discount at Gittner's," Cliff suggested.

"Wait till Billy gets here," Lillian said. "We'll hear all about it then."

Billy lived up to Lillian's expectations and they heard all about it. Hubert was awakened to hear the news.

"I'm going to call myself Billy Fisher, see? I can't get any cute name for myself that goes in with ladies' clothes or else I'd sound like a nance. But I got a raft of good ideas. I'm going to use 'Yes, sir, that's my baby' for a signing-off song. I'll change the words, see? I'll make it about my girl friend who wears Gittner's dresses and always looks like she's got Lady Duff-Gordon lashed to the mast. I'll change the song when I get a better idea, but this all come so sudden."

KEPT WOMAN

"What are they paying you, Billy?" Cliff asked.

"Jees, you got a nerve."

"Well, I was just interested, that's all."

"You wait a little while, brother, and you'll be reading in the newspapers what they're paying me."

Cliff retired to a corner. Lillian and Hubert had meant to congratulate Billy on his success, but it was impossible to get a word in.

Louise didn't try to talk. She just beamed on her spouse and seemed well content to bask in his reflected glory. Anna said later that Louise was lucky she had nailed Billy when she had, as she would have had a fat chance now. Louise's smug satisfaction suggested that she was thinking the same thing.

The Fishers didn't stay late. Billy had to be up early in the morning, combing through the music publishers' late hits.

"How about the paint business?" Lillian asked.

"Say, I'll clean up on that, too. I'm going to stick at it a while yet, of course, and I bet I'll sell oceans of paint when I tell the poor boobs that I'm a radio entertainer with a regular commercial program on the air. You know, they'll get asking me questions about the studio and what Graham MacNamee is like, and before you know it I'll be writing them up for a million dollars' worth of my old Brush-Alac."

Cliff laughed. "Say, Billy, when you get to see Graham MacNamee outside of the Pathé News I'll have you to dinner in my Park Avenue apartment."

"Oh, is that so? You'll remember you said that this time next year."

KEPT WOMAN

"I wouldn't be surprised," said Cliff.

Hubert and Lillian were alone at last and they promptly retired. Hubert said he had to be out early again in the morning. Lillian set the clock and left her kimono where she could snatch it readily.

It was teeming rain when they awakened to the clock's jangle. Lillian turned off the alarm and went to the window.

"It's pouring," she said.

"Is it? That's tough."

"Are you going out?"

"Certainly. Man's work can't be postponed on account of a little rain."

She went to the kitchen and put the percolator on the burner. She heard no sound from Hubert, and just before she dropped the eggs into boiling water she returned to investigate. It seemed that after all man's work could be postponed. Hubert was sound asleep. The covers were half off him, giving the impression that his intentions had been noble, but sleep had overtaken him in the midst of them.

Lillian gently tucked the covers about him and left him undisturbed. She returned to the kitchen and turned off the gas beneath the coffee and the egg water. Then she crept back to bed herself. What was the use of him going out and getting drenched? He'd get sick and then what would become of them? She was glad that sleep had kept him from faring forth in the rain, but, she reflected, he would probably be as mad as a hornet when he awakened and found what she had done.

It was noon when they awakened again. Hubert was

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very angry at Lillian and asked her if that was the sort of thing she would do when he had a responsible position. It was too late now, thanks to her, for him to go searching for any opportunities today; so she might just as well get the checkerboard. They played checkers till dinner-time and went out to dinner in a table d'hôte restaurant on Dyckman Street. Afterward they went to the movies. Hubert was of the opinion that saving pennies made you think you were broke and then you looked broke and then all was lost. It sounded like a good argument to Lillian. She wasn't concerned anyway. If things got really troublesome Hubert would certainly sell the cars. After all, he wasn't a damn fool. Two thousand dollars would be a tidy sum to go ahead on. So there was really nothing to worry about.

When Lillian set the clock that night she set it for nine. Hubert, after thinking the matter over well, decided that getting around to see people early would make him look like a cheap job-hunter. Ten or so was a nice hour to start looking people up.

The only difficulty was that he didn't know who to look up. He had rather planned in his innermost mind on the McKay Brothers. Too bad Arch hadn't been there. He ought to have asked Bert when Arch was expected back. Well, he'd go again in a week or so. But by then he'd probably be connected with something else.

He spent the next day at the club. It was the second time he'd been inside the place since he had met Lillian. It was a nice place to be, too. Lots of good fellows, good beer, good conversation. His day passed buttonholing one member after another and confessing to him that

KEPT WOMAN

he was bored with a life of leisure. Each listener said that he didn't blame him and agreed that it must be tiresome.

"Got anything that I could do over at your place? I'll go nuts if I don't get something to do." Hubert laughed as he spoke. He didn't want a fellow member to think that he really needed work.

Nobody had an opening for him.

"Well, if you hear of anything," Hubert would suggest carelessly to each. They would nod and hurry away.

He stayed at the club till after ten o'clock. He went back to Lillian then. It had been a good day. He had informed many men that he was open for offers and they in turn would inform their friends. Hubert figured that thus some three dozen men would be told that he was ready to return to the business world. He decided not to go forth again for a few days. His might look like a desperately needy case if he haunted the club or the offices of his friends. Besides, those men who had been told of his desire to once more assume responsibilities would be telling people about him, and that was enough.

While Hubert was concealing his need for work, the first of the month came around and with it the dapper rent collector.

Hubert paid him and announced that the apartment would be vacant by the next first.

The young gentleman smiled and reminded Hubert of his lease.

"Never mind that bunk," stormed Hubert. "I'll not

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live in any place where the janitor argues all day with the tenants and makes the place sound like an East Side tenement. Besides, my wife hasn't known a well day since we've lived here. The heat is bad and everything else."

The young man made a deprecating gesture with eloquent hands. "It's not my fault," he said. "I just thought maybe you forgot the lease. I'll tell the landlord. It's his business, not mine."

"They'll sue us," Lillian said as Hubert closed the door.

"I'd beat the case in any court in the country. Why, the service here has been terrible. No heat after ten o'clock at night or anything."

"That's the time that heat goes down in all apartments. You were foolish; you should have gone to see the landlord and told him that you met with business troubles."

"Why should I do that? What's it his business what I met with? I'm damned if I'll go ask favors of him."

"All right. Suit yourself."

Hubert went to the garage then. He had received the bill in his morning mail and had to have a little talk with the fellow. He entered the garage, wearing his genial smile, and went to the office at once.

"Say, let this bill go a month, will you? I'm a wee bit strapped for cash."

"We don't usually do that, Mr. Cory."

"Of course not. I don't usually ask you to either. If I meant to gyp you I'd park the cars here till you

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yelled and then I'd take them both out and let you go fish for your money. I'm being straight with you."

"Well—"

"If you don't want to, all right. Those new garages down by the river are giving a month's concession. I'll put my cars there."

"I guess you're all right. Leave them here."

"Don't guess. I don't want you to be watching me all month as though I was trying to put something over on you."

"It's all right, Mr. Cory. You won't run away."

"Damn right, I won't," said Hubert. "All your customers should be like me; then you wouldn't have to worry."

Lillian began at once to look for a new apartment. First she tried houses that were as new but not as grand as the one she had grown used to. After all, a new house cannot be utterly unpleasant. The rents frightened her. Even two rooms and kitchenette were fifty in some places and fifty-five in others.

She consulted Hubert after strolling through Inwood and regarding apartments both inside and out.

"How much can we pay?" she asked.

"Well, I think we ought to be able to get something for forty dollars," he answered.

"Hubert, don't you remember Anna couldn't get anything for forty?"

"Sure she could have if she wanted. She just happened to like that forty-five-dollar one, though."

"We won't get in a new house for forty dollars."

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"Well, who cares about a new house?"

"That's right," said Lillian. "After all it won't be for long."

"Of course not."

Remembering that it wouldn't be for long, keeping firmly in her mind that thought, Lillian went out next day again to hunt for a new home. Inwood's slum row. Gray houses with dirty window panes and screeching janitresses. After all, it wouldn't be for long—

"Have you a vacancy? Two rooms and kitchenette."

The apartment faced the street. The sun shone in one room. But what a small room! The walls were painted a bilious yellow and the woodwork was a dark brown. There were no outlets here. Just a chandelier that hung disconsolately from the ceiling. The kitchenette was in a closet, a small, rusty black stove, a sink, and one shelf for dishes. The ice-box was in the hall. The bathroom was dark and small. No shower. The bedroom was a box with a window and a closet.

"How much?" asked Lillian.

"Thirty-five dollars."

Well, it wouldn't be for long. Hubert would be surprised, too, that she had been able to get an apartment so cheap. Of course if it was going to be an indefinite stay she couldn't bear it. But for a month or two what difference did it make?

"I'll take it," said Lillian.

The janitress looked out the window at the trim, clean little roadster. "You'll take it?" she said.

"Yes, from the first of next month."

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The janitress shook her head. "No," she said, "I got to have some one take it from the fifteenth of this month. I got to have half a month's rent in for this month."

"But my rent's already paid for this month where I am."

"Sorry." The janitress shook her head, and her eyes beneath the frill on her dust cap watched Lillian's face anxiously. "I'll see what I can do," she said after a moment. "I'll call up the landlord."

The apartment was on the third floor and as Lillian followed the janitress down the three flights of stairs she found herself wishing that the landlord would not consider waiting till the first. The stairs were fearfully dirty, and the commingled odors of cooking foods that filled the halls sickened her. But it wouldn't be for long. Oh, blessed thought.

The janitress described Lillian as a nice lady when she spoke to the landlord. She sold him the idea of waiting till the first so that he could have her nice lady for a tenant.

"That will be all right," the janitress said brightly as she hung up the receiver. "Could you let me have ten dollars deposit?"

Lillian got a receipt signed Mrs. J. Svensen in exchange for her ten dollars. She found upon gaining the street that several of the children of the gray row of houses were disporting themselves in the roadster. She was very angry and experienced a desire to bang their heads together, but she only smiled at them and said, "I need the car now." No use in making them sore.

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They'd probably scratch the cars all up if they took a dislike to her.

The garden court had never before looked so peaceful and lovely as it looked to her that afternoon. She gazed at it with stricken eyes and had to reason with herself to keep from feeling low. After all, this was just another angle of being a kept woman. Gee, you couldn't always be on the crest of the wave. The kind of life she had picked for herself was one of ups and downs. More ups, of course, than downs, but this was the test of whether she was big enough for the job or not. After all, when you were used to nice things it took courage to be one of Mrs. Svensen's tenants.

Her living-room seemed beautiful to her as she looked at it. Gosh, she'd never really appreciated it before. Oh, well, when Hubert got the kind of job he was after they'd get a place that was even nicer than this one. She'd like it all the better, too, for having lived in a dump for a while.

And maybe she wouldn't have to move at all. Maybe Hubert would connect with something good before the first of the month and they'd let Mrs. Svensen keep their ten dollars and the bilious little apartment. Gee, Hubert would look funny in those tiny rooms. He was so big. The furniture would look funny, too. Like a well-dressed lady slumming.

But the furniture didn't look funny in the dingy little apartment. For the pink satin chair was soiled and torn in a few places, the rugs had cigarette burns, the Windsor chairs were wobbly and loose, the three-piece suit was stained and scratched.

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On that first day in their new home Hubert took a look around, then buried his face in Lillian's shoulder. "God, Lillian," he said, "this is terrible."

She caught her short upper lip between her teeth and bit it hard. Then she said, "Sure, it's terrible. Wait till we get the pictures up. It'll look better then."

She shook herself free of him and ran for a hammer.

It wouldn't be for long. Oh, God, it couldn't be for long!

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THERE is more to being broke than at first meets the eye of the uninitiated. It is not just a matter of doing without bracket lights, a built-in shower, and a white gas-stove. It is not even merely a matter of hurrying by shop windows, washing one's own hair, and mending runs instead of throwing stockings away. If it were only this none but the very weak and inefficient would mind poverty. It is more, much more.

You live where the rents are very cheap. Your neighbors are poor, and with trouble and hardship they have lost any fastidiousness which once they may have had. You buy an exterminating powder for kitchen pests and you use it freely and frequently. All to no avail. If the woman upstairs, downstairs or beside you is satisfied to have swarms of roaches then you must be satisfied, too.

Too, the dumbwaiter becomes a horror to you. You loathe opening it. The garbage is set upon it without regard for the morning call. In paper bags, in boxes, in milk bottles, the garbage is thrown upon the dumbwaiter, and the janitor is stubborn. He will not remove it till garbage call next morning.

There are children about you shouting in the halls, crying, screaming. You fear at first that one of the number has been hurt. Later you hope that one has. The city heat, the garbage, the roaches, the crying children, have

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your nerves at the breaking-point. You can bear it no longer and perhaps you flee from it all and some one with a secure and satisfactory income who believes that poverty and romance are synonymous calls you a quitter.

The man at the garage wanted his money. Hubert hadn't it to give him. He told him so.

"Well, you don't move your cars out of here till you get it."

Hubert was terrorized. Helen would be wanting the Packard. He couldn't tell her he was broke. He heard in his imagination the cold, cutting tones of his wife's voice. He couldn't tell her the Packard was in for repairs. That would be worse. Funny how he hadn't been able to connect up with a good job. It must be a bad season or perhaps even a bad year. Well, there'd be no fooling around now. If he got those cars loose he'd certainly sell the Nash. Too bad he couldn't sell the Packard.

He hunted up Carl Feldman. Feldman had always been a good scout.

Carl greeted him affably. He liked Hubert despite the fact that he thought him Nature's prime sap.

"How's tricks, Hubert?"

"Rotten. I was in on that Imperial steel slump." He had been reading the papers that morning.

"Is that so? Gee, that's too bad."

"Yeh. Oh, it doesn't matter an awful lot only I'm a little tied up. I bought something else on a tip from one of the big boys. It'll come through big around the twentieth of the month. I've got absolute information on it. In the meantime I'm a little short. Could you let

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me have a hundred or so, Carl, till the end of the month?"

"Well, I'll tell you, Hubert, I'm a little pressed myself. How much could you get by with?"

"A hundred would fit me fine."

"A hundred? Gee, I don't know."

"You know I'm good for it, Carl, don't you?"

Carl regarded him speculatively. The fact was that he didn't know that Hubert was good for it, didn't even think he was. Still, he'd been a business man for years and had quit clean. Well, what the hell? A hundred dollars wasn't a million.

Hubert hurried back to Inwood with the hundred dollars Carl had drawn from the bank for him. He handed it to the garage man with a smile.

"If I had known that you'd have conniption fits over such a small amount I'd have paid you long ago," he said. "Take what I owe you out of this and next month's rent on the Packard. I'm taking the Nash away today to give to my nephew."

Lillian was impressed when five minutes later he honked the roadster's horn beneath her window. She had never expected to see either car again. She hurried downstairs to him, pulling her coat on as she ran.

"How did you talk him into giving up the car?"

"I paid him."

"Paid him? Where did you get the money?"

"Why, I was up talking to Carl Feldman about a job and he suddenly remembered that he owed me a hundred bucks. Can you imagine that for luck? It had gone right plumb out of my mind."

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"Gee, that was luck. What about the job?"

"That sounds good. I have to go see the fellow tomorrow. I'm going to sell this car, Lil, I just decided. You don't mind, do you?"

"No, but I think you're foolish. Why don't you sell the Packard? You'll get more money for it, and the roadster will be cheaper for us to run."

"Now we've been over that a dozen times. I'm not going to sell the Packard."

"All right."

"Well, I'm going to see about selling this car now. Want to go with me?"

"No. I have to go to the stores. You'll be home for dinner, won't you?"

"Sure."

"See you later."

Lillian walked over to Dyckman Street. She passed the butcher shop where she used to deal and turned her head away. She was always afraid that the butcher would come running out and ask her why she didn't deal with him any more. He'd been a very obliging butcher and he had good meat, only it was expensive. Down below Post Avenue was her new butcher. His store was one of a chain and he was only employed there. He brought you meat out of the ice-box already chopped. He never let you pick out your own beef and watch him chop it right before your eyes.

She bought three lamb chops today. Hubert could always eat two. She had potatoes. A can of peas, a loaf of bread, and a half-dozen eggs. What was all the con-niving for? She had forgotten that Hubert was selling

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the Nash. She could have gotten a chicken. She decided to get a rich, creamy cake in the bakery.

She crossed Dyckman Street and directly in front of Loft's she encountered Anna Sullivan and Louise Fisher walking together. It was the first time she had seen them since she had been in the new apartment.

"Why, Lillian!"

"Well, for Heaven's sake!"

They stared at her as though she had risen from the dead. She stared back at them.

"Where have you been?" they asked in unison.

"Settling my apartment and one thing and another," she returned. "Did you quit work, Anna?"

"No, I've been sick. This is really my first day out. Louise has been keeping me company. Gee, we wondered and wondered where you'd gone."

"You knew."

"No, honest, Lillian. I knew it was that row where the nigger janitor stabbed his wife, but I didn't know which house. We've wondered about you a lot."

Lillian was conscious of Louise's hard, inquiring eyes regarding her under the rakish slant of a pale green cloche. She saw Anna's glance roving over her bundles, the soiled dress under her unbuttoned coat. She was suddenly conscious that her heels needed straightening and that she was out without a hat. Good God, was this she—Lili Cory? She was frightened to walk on and leave Anna and Louise alone. They would say things to each other about her. They would perhaps look back at her and pity her.

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"Come on up to my place," she said. "Let's have some coffee and cake."

The girls were willing to accompany her. They threw over the chance to see John Gilbert make love to Greta Garbo. It was worth it. They wanted to see Lillian's new home.

They waited politely at the bakery counter while she purchased an apple cream cake. Then they walked home with her.

Lillian took their wraps and bade them be seated while she made coffee. They looked the apartment over. Louise was the bolder of the two.

"What possessed you to come here?" she asked.

"Now, what would possess anybody to come here? The rent's cheap."

"Oh," breathed Louise. "Where's Hubert?"

"He'll be in soon. He's in a bit of a hole. He made some bum investments and we're trying to make them up by economizing for a while. All in the life of a kept woman, girls, all in the life of a kept woman."

"Still got the cars?" asked Anna.

"We're selling the Nash. Not the Packard, of course. We're not that bad off."

"I see," said Anna. "Well, you're certainly a brick to be willing to live here."

"Oh, I don't mind. We're hardly ever in. We've been chasing around a lot. I've been meaning to drop over and see you both at different times, but you know how it is. You get busy and all."

The girls nodded understandingly. Louise asked if she could have another cup of coffee. Lillian poured

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out fresh coffee and asked about Cliff and Billy. It seemed they were both doing splendidly.

"I thought you were trying to dodge us," Louise said. "You never sent your address or come for us any more." She settled herself comfortably and looked encouragingly at Lillian. "You can tell all your troubles to me," her expression said.

"I thought I wrote my address out for you," Lillian lied. "Funny that I didn't."

"Well, you didn't. Theresa was asking about you the other day, too."

"Tell her where I am, will you?"

"Why don't you write to her? Or you could call her up."

Lillian considered it for a moment. "You tell her," she said then. "I never get around to writing or phoning people."

"You used to," Louise accused.

"Yeh. Well, I've been busy."

"Doing what?" Anna protested. "Gee, it couldn't have took long to settle this apartment."

"Well," Lillian wrinkled her brows as though to recall some of her recent social activities. "Did you ever hear Hubert speak of the McKay Brothers?"

"Yeh, I think so."

"They're the men who bought his business. Well, we've been running around quite a bit with them and their wives." Lillian paused for a moment to wonder if either of the McKay Brothers had a wife. "Then we've been seeing quite a bit of Carl Feldman."

"No time for old friends, eh?" Louise asked.

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Lillian smiled at Louise and said, "You know different, only Heaven knows this is no place to entertain people."

The girls looked around again and their eyes remarked that it really was an amazingly ugly place.

"Well, now that we've been here," said Anna, "can we bring the boys over?"

Lillian had one of her rare flashes of insight. "Yes," she said, "you'd better bring them over. They'd never believe you if they didn't see it for themselves."

"Oh, it isn't as terrible as all that." Louise's eyes searched for something about which she could say a pleasant word. "You get the sun in this room," she said at last.

"That's a big help to me," Lillian said. "I'll be just crazy about it on a hot summer's day."

"My God, how long do you expect to stay here?" Anna asked.

"Not long, but it will be summer before we know it."

The girls were looking at their watches, drawing out their compacts, their lipsticks, pulling their hats more firmly down upon their heads. Lillian thought it would be cute if they rehearsed these gestures and did them more perfectly in unison. It was pretty well done even as it was, but Louise had twisted her leg to see if the seam in her stocking was straight; Anna hadn't done that. It sort of spoiled things. They were going now. Lillian thought of her Nash roadster. Maybe even now somebody else owned it and Hubert was on his way to her with money. Tonight would be a good time to have

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a little party. Anna and Louise were bound to bring their husbands sometime and certainly while Hubert had money was the most auspicious. They could buy a bottle of gin and not look so dreadfully poverty-stricken.

"What are you doing tonight?" she asked.

Anna and Louise looked at each other.

"I guess nothing," Louise said.

"Well, why don't you all come over tonight?"

"All right."

Louise arose purposefully. "Well, I have to beat it then," she said, "if we're coming back tonight. I have a lot of things that have to be done."

After they had gone Lillian threw herself on the couch and began to wait for Hubert. She was always waiting for him nowadays. The minutes spent in waiting were happy minutes. She always felt that he was hurrying to her with good news. When he finally came he never had much to tell. There was always some one who had offered him a job. Nothing astonishing there. People were bound to offer a fellow like Hubert jobs by the barrellful. Only they never offered him more than five thousand a year. She felt sometimes that he ought to take one of these jobs, but on the other hand he was probably right. Why should he get himself into the five-thousand-dollar class when he was worth so much more? She knew that it was only a matter of patience and courage and they would be on Easy Street again. But oh, she hated this place so much. If things would only come right.

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Hubert got five hundred dollars for the car.

"There you are," he said, spreading the money before her. "Money isn't hard to get."

"Not if a person has a car to sell every day," she answered.

"You watch now, kid, this is lucky money. This'll break the ice. Everything will change from today on."

She told him about meeting Louise and Anna. "They're coming back this evening. Cliff and Billy are coming, too. Do me a favor, Hubert, let me spend twenty-five dollars, will you?"

"Spend fifty if you like. Spend a hundred. What do you want to do?"

"Oh, Hubert, I'm a mess. I haven't anything to wear or anything. I haven't bought things for ages. You know I had a lot of things and they all went at once. I don't want Louise or Anna to think we're broke."

"Well, this apartment won't keep our secret very well, Lillian."

"I kinda covered that by talking of economizing after you made bad investments. See? But I hate to look awful myself."

"Sure. Go ahead."

After dinner Lillian rushed out to Dyckman Street. She got a dress for fifteen dollars. It was blue georgette with a pleated skirt. Very pretty. She bought shoes for six dollars. Black satin pumps they were. She didn't care much for the heels. They weren't high and slim enough, but she was in too much of a hurry to hunt about. Stockings could be managed on a dollar nineteen. They were pretty stockings. A shade known as autumn

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dawn. Her hair did need attention, but she could let that go. If anything came up about it she could always say that she was letting it grow.

Lillian bought a bottle of gin for two dollars, a dozen lemons, and a bottle of fruit juice. She went to the delicatessen store then and ordered a dozen sandwiches—ham and cheese combinations—to be sent over at eleven o'clock.

Less than thirty dollars had been spent and she had redeemed herself for running about Dyckman Street hatless with run-down heels.

It was thrilling, too, to be having company again. She could see no reason why she had abruptly broken with the Sullivans and the Fishers. That had been a fool trick. It hadn't been fun to sit night after night in the little apartment playing innumerable games of checkers and quarreling with Hubert to vary the monotony. This was the time when she needed Billy's wisecracks and the others' endless talk. It had been stupid to be ashamed of being broke. It was only temporary anyway. It would be good to have the Sullivans and the Fishers around her again.

They came at nine o'clock. The girls had changed their dresses since the afternoon. Lillian was glad that she was looking well. The men eyed the apartment and sat down. They did not seem to know that this was the same couch upon which they had sat so many times before. They had also slept on it, spilled drinks on it, and burned holes in it, but now they sat stiffly on it and close to the edge.

Lillian was excessively gay. She took their hats and

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coats and flung them upon the bed in the other room. She talked as she mixed the drinks and laughed a great deal.

"I hear you sold the Nash," Billy said. "I wish I had known you wanted to. I'd have bought it." His tone was one of extreme boredom. It was really no great matter. One buys so many cars.

"Billy is rolling in wealth nowadays," Anna said. "I'm surprised he talks to us."

"Making out well, Billy?" Hubert asked.

Billy became apologetic. "Don't pay any attention to her," he said. "She thinks a guy who broadcasts is lousy with money. You know how it is, Scotty, I pull through."

Lillian served the drink and conversation perished while the experimental sip was taken.

"That's gorgeous, Lillian," Anna said.

Everybody agreed and discovered that there wasn't anything else to say about anything in the world.

Hubert was sullenly quiet. Lillian asked Billy how he sang in the studio. Louder or softer than usual?

"About the same," said Billy.

"Oh."

Silence. Conversation was very scarce, but they got along the best they could till the sandwiches came. Lillian put them on a plate and handed them around.

Anna said they were gorgeous.

At twelve o'clock the Sullivans and the Fishers departed.

"Now don't be a stranger, Lillian," the girls said. "Come around any time at all."

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"I will."

"We had a lovely time. Good night."

"Good night."

The door closed and Lillian went back to her living-room and looked it over.

Every cigarette had been properly extinguished in an ash tray. Every glass was right side up and unbroken. There had been no fights and no noise of any kind.

Hubert looked at the platter whereon six sandwiches still rested. Everybody had refused a second.

"They weren't as hungry tonight as they always used to be," he said. "Or maybe they're getting polite in their old age."

"Yes, they were very polite," said Lillian. She seemed to forget them then. She was silent for a whole minute, standing motionless in the center of the little room that was too pitiful to misuse. "God damn them," she blazed suddenly. "Coming around here being polite. Where do they get that stuff?"

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

HUBERT had to buy a tire for the Packard and a suit of clothes for himself. Lillian had to have a hat, too, and another dress. Even at that the five hundred dollars did them for two months. It was lucky money only in the sense that it was a good thing they had it, for no positions glittering with gold reared their heads. There was no magic upon the five bills which the Nash had brought, and June descending upon Inwood found Hubert and Lillian warm, broke, but strangely enough, not discouraged.

Hubert had demoted the Packard to the section of the garage wherein it received no service. That was cheaper. When Helen raved about the car's appearance then he had it washed. The Packard had become a loathsome monster to Hubert. He hated the sight of it. A millstone about his neck. The gasoline it consumed, the greasing and garaging and other things it cried for, were difficult for him to provide; yet he could not get rid of the car. Not being his, he couldn't sell it. If he returned it to Helen he would have to show Lillian money for its sale or else confess that he had never owned it. He begrudged the car even the water that he gave it. Lillian never suggested any more that the Packard should be sold. She saw now that without it

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they would be just any down-and-out couple. The Packard was their mark of distinction, their last remaining link with the world that had garden courts.

Never once did her faith in Hubert falter. He was not the kind of man who is called poor; he was merely broke. Something adventurous with a hint of a happy ending lurked in that word "broke." The summer, of course, was a bad time to get a position. But they'd manage somehow, and the day would finally come when Hubert would hit things right again. A man who can spend twenty-five thousand dollars without batting an eyelash isn't slated for the rocks.

Hubert hadn't remembered that he owed Carl Feldman a hundred dollars till he and Lillian were down once more to their last twenty-dollar bill.

"Gee," he thought, "I ought to have paid him."

Still, it wouldn't have been good sense to leave himself short. Besides, what was a hundred dollars? Some day, very soon now, he'd walk up to Carl with the hundred dollars and perhaps a bottle of real good Scotch and he'd tell Carl the whole story about how very broke he had been. They'd have a drink together and a darn good laugh. But in the meantime he dodged Carl and when Carl wrote to him he did not answer the letter. He would explain everything once he was all set again.

Sometimes he wondered if he ought to take a job doing just anything at all. It would only be temporary, of course. Just till things started breaking right again. It might be the sensible thing to do, but gee, a fellow who has owned his own business and really been some-

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body couldn't drive a taxi or be a canvasser or anything like that. It wouldn't be sensible, come to think of it. A big business man isn't going to take a guy on to handle an executive job if he's just come from doing some little unimportant thing.

When the last twenty-dollar bill had been broken to pay the iceman Hubert went to see Arch McKay. It was the first effort he had made to see him since the time he had seen Bert in the McKays' house. He had often thought of going up, but something had always intervened. Besides, it wasn't good sense to appear anxious.

Arch McKay was tall and slim. He never looked well-shaven because of the thick blue-blackness of his beard. He had tight, narrow lips, and Hubert thought he was kind of a mean-looking duck. Funny that he never noticed before today that Arch's voice was deep and gruff.

He shook hands with Hubert and told him to make himself comfortable. He disappeared then and Hubert sat alone regarding familiar objects and hearing familiar sounds.

When Arch came back he carried his hat. "Had lunch?" he asked.

"Not yet."

"Come on."

They walked around the corner to a small, quiet restaurant. Hubert recognized it as the sort that Louise Fisher always called refined. When Hubert had patronized it there had been a Greek owner and a great deal of noise during lunch hour. It had changed hands. He sighed. Nothing seemed to have remained the same.

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"What have you been doing?" Arch asked him.

"Wasting my time."

"Is that so? Don't you like being retired?"

"Not a bit. Wish I could get something to do."

"That oughtn't to be hard."

"Well, it is, Arch. See, this time of the year and all. Maybe Bert told you I offered to help him out while you were in Canada."

Arch nodded. The waiter came for their order. Arch said, "What's it going to be, Scott?"

Hubert thought he'd like the blue plate luncheon. Arch said, "Make it two."

The waiter went away and Arch sat quiet for a long while. Then he said, "A fellow over at the club—I won't tell you who—said he thought you were broke. If that was the case, Scott, I could get you something to do. It wouldn't be much. It would only pay about thirty-five a week, but it would be better than nothing."

"Sure," said Hubert, nodding eagerly.

"Only I know it isn't true," Arch McKay went on. "Your house must be worth thirty thousand and you have the Packard and you've just bought that piece of property next to the movie theater."

Hubert's eyes widened and Arch added, "Well, your wife did. Same thing." The waiter brought the blue plates and departed. Arch picked up his fork. "So by my figuring you can't be broke."

Arch McKay fixed Hubert with his eyes. His glance said, "You act like a fellow who is broke; yet facts are facts. Clear up the mystery. Come clean if you want help from me."

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Hubert filled his mouth with string beans and stared over McKay's shoulder at an electric fan that whirred busily. Thirty-five dollars a week. Gee, that would be great now that he and Lillian knew how to live without splurging. And maybe there was a future to the job, too. Gosh, past forty and looking for a job with a future. Oh, well, many a man had built his fortune later than that. He'd take the job. He looked back at Arch. He was waiting to be convinced that Hubert needed that job. Arch wanted to know why he appeared prosperous and yet ran about asking for work. He couldn't tell him. There was too much to tell. It went back to old man Dietz who had bought the house and deeded it to Helen, who had warned Helen that Hubert wasn't much and had lived to say, "I told you so." It meant telling Arch that Helen had furnished a separate room for him and that he had to knock on her door before entering. Arch wouldn't understand. He couldn't because even Hubert couldn't. Helen was funny. Always had been. Once they had a big party. All the nicest people in town were there. Old man Dietz's friends and Helen's. When everybody had gone Helen slumped in a chair and cried. Hadn't come to bed at all that night. Just stayed downstairs pacing the floor and crying. No reason for it. It had been a good party, a successful party. Hubert had done card tricks for them and made fifty-cent pieces turn into pennies. No reason why Helen should have cried that night. All these things were somehow vaguely involved in what Arch wanted to know. And he couldn't tell him. Take the time Helen had bought Liberty Bonds and explained

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to their small son that she bought them because they were a good investment. Hubert Sr. had added, "Yes, and it helps whip the God-damned Germans." Helen had said, "You ignoramus, your son is a God-damned German on my side." And that night he had heard her explain to the boy that the German soldiers must be beaten for the sake of world prosperity but that they were just fellows like Uncle Rudolph. Great stuff to tell a kid, and it turned the kid against his father, too.

Arch was still waiting.

Maybe he could say instead that he loved another woman and explain in part the complications that arose therefrom. But Arch McKay was an ardent churchman and a good Rotarian.

"Hell, no. I'm not broke," Hubert said. "Just bored with being idle."

"That's what I figured," Arch returned.

They talked of other things then. Of politics, of real estate, of tailors, and of business. Of baseball, of weather, of cars, and of aviation. Finally Arch said that he had to be getting back to work.

"Think I'll go to the ball game," Hubert said. "Oh, gee, I can't. I'm out without a red cent and no check-book."

Arch dug his hand in his pocket and brought out a twenty-dollar bill.

"Wait till I pay the check," he said. "I'll let you have a couple of dollars. Five do?"

"Make it ten, will you? I may have dinner in New York."

Arch said, "I'll give you fifteen if you want it."

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"All right. I'll let you have it back tomorrow."

They walked in silence to the place where the Packard was parked. Hubert jumped in. "Thanks, Arch. See you about that tomorrow."

"All right. So long."

Arch stood on the pavement watching the car till it disappeared. He scratched his head and looked perplexed. Instead of going back to work he strolled then over to the club. Even so superior a creature as a business man likes to talk puzzling matters over with his friends.

Hubert went back to Lillian. She was lying on the couch in a yellow kimono. Her hair was still tousled and her face unpowdered.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Sick?"

"No. Only it's so God-damned hot. I haven't got the pep to get dressed."

"It'll be hotter than this, kid. This is only the beginning. Come on, get dressed. We'll go for a ride to the seashore and have dinner down there."

"Don't you think we'd better go easy on our money?"

"Why, I got fifteen dollars today in a funny way. I was up talking to Arch McKay and he happens to mention that old man Schliffer owes him a hundred and fifty dollars which he can't collect. Well, old man Schliffer and me are like that"—Hubert exhibited two fingers closely entwined—"friends for years. Him and me. I hopped right over there and old man Schliffer passes over the money like nothing. Said he just didn't like the McKay Brothers' way of asking for it. Well, when I showed the money to Arch, maybe he wasn't glad!

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Thought it was gone forever. He insisted upon giving me ten percent collection fee. I didn't like to take it. I thought it looked kind of cheap, but the first thing you know, Arch begins to think I'm holding out for more money; so, of course, I took it then."

"Sure. Did he say anything about a job?"

"Well, not much. The McKays ain't making out so awfully well. If they'd take me in they'd do better, but of course they can't pay my price. Arch says a fellow over at the club—he wouldn't tell me who—is anxious to talk to me about a job, but when Arch mentioned what he'd pay I didn't want to know who the guy was. Come on, Lil, let's go out to the shore."

Lillian was dressing when Theresa arrived. Theresa had become a frequent visitor. Her little Essex was a familiar sight parked behind the big Packard.

She was dressed in a red and white silk gingham dress with a floppy red hat and red pumps. She looked cool and clean and pretty. She was a heartening visitor and had a manner of dropping in as willingly as though it was a pleasure to visit in the mean little apartment. She could slap at a roach in so casual a manner that Lillian was never embarrassed, and she could sit for hours on one of the wobbly Windsor chairs and look comfortable.

Lillian, clad in the blue georgette dress that had by now lost all of its original freshness and style, gazed wistfully at Theresa's trim summer togs.

"Don't let me keep you in," Theresa said. "I'm just barging around and if you have to go somewhere, don't let me interfere."

"No, glad to have you," said Lillian. The two girls

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lit cigarettes and settled down to talk. Hubert stared out the window at the clean little Essex. God, his car was dirty. Helen would have a fit.

"Say," he said, "I think I'll take the car and have it washed. I don't want to listen to you two dames gab anyhow."

Theresa watched him go out. She said nothing of what she was thinking and was surprised when Lillian said, "He feels that he really ought to go back to work, but I want him to wait till autumn when there will be better opportunities."

Theresa nodded slowly. Lillian must know how things stood better than she could possibly know. Perhaps matters weren't as bad as they appeared to be.

"I saw Anna and Cliff last night," she said after a time. "They dropped in. Hymie was under the shower and I was washing my hair when they came. Of all times! I could have killed them."

"I can imagine," said Lillian. "I haven't seen them or the Fishers for ages. They all came in that one night I told you about and never came again. I guess they didn't like the apartment. Too lowbrow for them."

"Anna is going to have a baby," Theresa said.

"Oh, yes? That's a surprise to me. I thought she was going to work for ages yet."

"Well, you know, those things happen."

"Yeh. I'll have to write Anna a letter of good wishes and so forth. Maybe I'll drop over and see her."

Theresa shook her head and looked steadily at Lillian. "Don't," she said.

"Why not?"

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"Well, don't, Lillian, that's all."

"But why?"

"Look here, you know I'm not a tale-carrier, don't you? I'll tell you why not, but it's not for the fun of carrying tales. It's because I hate to see you hurt by a little skunk like Cliff Sullivan."

"What's the matter?"

"Don't laugh, it's pathetic. We were all talking, you know, and Hymie happened to mention you. As a matter of fact we were talking about hair on account of me standing there drying mine, and Hymie said you had the loveliest hair he had ever seen. That from my devoted husband, mind you. Anyhow we talked about you for a minute or two and Cliff said that they wouldn't be seeing you because a woman in Anna's condition couldn't afford to be seen being friends with you. He said that people would start saying that maybe Anna wasn't married either and when the baby came people might say it was a little basket. That's what Cliff said. Basket instead of the real word. Cliff is so cute that way, the skunk."

"Well, maybe it's all for the best," said Lillian. "People know what they want to do about things."

"If it wasn't for you," Theresa said, hotly, "Anna would have a basket that could walk and say 'Da-Da' by now."

"Oh, Theresa!" Lillian was shocked. "Who told you that?"

"Hymie. Anna told him herself one night when she was plastered. Told him not to tell, but she was barking up the wrong tree when she picked Hymie. He told me, but, of course, he wouldn't tell any one else. She

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told him, too, about a lot of other things you had done for her and Cliff."

"Well, why doesn't Louise come around any more? She isn't having a baby, is she?"

"Not that I know of."

"Why can't she be seen with me? I'm too common, I guess, for a famous man's wife to be friends with."

"To hell with them, Lillian. They're a bunch of oil cans."

"I know it. I guess I always knew it, but I've never been one to like people for a reason."

"Yes. I never sponged on you or talked about you, and still you like Louise better than me."

"No, I don't. Maybe I did once, but living in this lousy place with nothing to do but think, you get kind of sensible even if you fight against it."

Hubert came back just as Theresa was saying good-by to Lillian. She was inviting them to Sunday dinner at her house and Lillian was accepting. Hubert was glad. Sundays were mean, hard days. Everything closed up, everybody quiet. If a fellow was ever going to be blue and discouraged, Sunday was the day for it, all right.

"I guess it's too late to go to the shore now," Lillian said.

"Yes, I guess it is."

"Well, we'll have a good dinner at home. I'll run out and get a good thick steak and corn on the cob and tomatoes and a real creamy cake. How does that sound?"

"Fine."

It was while they were eating the good thick steak that a thought occurred to Lillian. "Say," she said,

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"you know what we ought to have done? We ought to have gotten a cheap dinner tonight and gone to the shore tomorrow."

"Gee, yeh," said Hubert. He stopped chewing as though it were not too late to conserve. "Oh, well, what the hell." He resumed his chewing as he spoke. "There'll be many more days to go to the shore."

After dinner Lillian went to the couch and Hubert to his big chair. It was too warm for checkers or the movies. They were silent for more than an hour, listening to the cry of a baby, the shouts of children in the street, and women talking to each other down at the door. Lillian thought Hubert had fallen asleep. She glanced over at him. He was watching the street interestedly, as though something of importance were transpiring.

"What are you looking at?" she asked languidly.

"Nothing."

"Oh, I thought you were looking at something."

"No."

"Oh."

"There's nothing to look at."

"No. I suppose not. Well, I guess I might as well get at those dishes."

"I'll help you."

"Never mind. There aren't many."

They were in bed by ten o'clock.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

SOMETIMES Hubert worried about the situation a little. Once he even went so far as to ask himself what the outcome could be. He had borrowed now from Carl Feldman, Arch McKay, two of the boys at the club; and once on the street, encountering Bert McKay, he had borrowed five dollars from him. It seemed so wasteful not to make use of that accidental meeting. Bert had looked at him strangely and Hubert knew that Arch had told him of the fifteen which he had borrowed in June. It was July now and Hubert had not seen Arch since the day they had lunched together. He had fixed it all right, though. He had said, "Tell Arch I'll be up to see him tomorrow and I'll give you this five then, too."

There were other men with whom he had been friendly. Some of them would probably let him have fifty or even a hundred, but they were men who had a speaking acquaintance with Helen. Gee, if they ever told her it would be awful. Helen would sure have plenty to say.

Gosh, it was July now and not a job in sight. Maybe when the weather got cooler and the important business men were coming back from the shore and the mountains, maybe then prospects would be brighter. But now there was rent, gas, electricity, two mouths to feed, and a Packard to support.

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Hubert sat in the car and ran over in his mind the names of everybody he knew. Some had already been borrowed from. Some had no money. Some weren't extra friendly toward him, and some knew Helen too well. The car was parked on Two Hundred and Seventh Street right beside Isham Park. He was supposed to be out interviewing various business magnates, but there was nobody to interview, and there was no use worrying Lillian by telling her so. He had driven his car to its present whereabouts an hour before, and there he sat with three dollars and a half in his pocket, wondering to whom he could turn for help. He knew there was no use in asking Cliff or Billy for the money he had once given them. They would only assure him that they, too, were broke. Cliff probably was now, with the baby coming and all. But Billy—he ought to have money. Hubert felt sure, however, that Billy would never return a nickel he had borrowed, and it would be humiliating to ask for it. Now whom could he borrow from?

A girl with a floppy red hat passed close to the Packard. Hubert looked at the hat and got an inspiration. Maybe there was nothing in the idea; still, it wouldn't hurt to try.

She would be awake. She wasn't the sort who slept late. Anyhow it was after eleven. He lost no time in testing the merits of his inspiration. He went at once to the apartment on Broadway where lived his friends the Mosses. During the five-minute ride Theresa had become very dear to him. The more he thought of her, the more kind-hearted and understanding she seemed. She wouldn't even be surprised to see him alone and

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at this hour. She had become, in that short ride, the sort of friend who anticipates one's every need.

Theresa, however, disappointed him on one score. When she opened the door she said, "Well, for Heaven's sake!" Then she laughed and said, "Come on in. I guess I didn't sound very hospitable, but I wasn't expecting you, you know. Come in."

He followed her to the living-room and through to the kitchen. She had been ironing but pulled the plug out of the wall socket in preparation for a lengthy visit. He stood in the kitchen door as she spread the dampened garments over a small line and put her iron on the marble window ledge to cool.

They went back to the living-room to sit down. Theresa lit a cigarette and asked how Hubert and Lillian were. She was plainly curious as to what had prompted the call, and Hubert was loath to come to the reason for his visit.

For more than a half-hour Theresa manufactured conversation, now and then permitting a minute's silence to fall encouragingly.

At last Hubert said, "Theresa, I hate to ask you what I've come to ask you today. I really do. It goes against my grain and if it wasn't for Lillian I'd take a licking before I'd ask you this. But you see—I guess it's pretty plain to you—things have been going pretty bad with us."

Theresa nodded.

"Well, fact is, I'm in an awful bad way. Lillian doesn't realize how bad and I don't want to tell her. No use in worrying her, I figure. I'd like to know—

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Fact is, I want to ask you to lend me a hundred dollars."

Theresa swallowed and looked hard at Hubert for a minute. "What can you do with a hundred dollars?" she asked.

"What can I do with a hundred dollars! My God, Theresa, feed myself and Lil and attend to a lot of things."

"Yes, but don't you see what I mean—a hundred dollars won't last long—and then where are you again? Right back where you started from."

"But I hope to have a job by then."

"Look, Hubert, a hundred dollars can't last two weeks with all the things you seem to have to do with it, and in two weeks you won't have a job if you haven't gotten one in all the months you've been looking."

"Well, see, I've got a good one in view."

"I'd sell the Packard if I were you, Hubert." Her tone was a trifle cold.

"But I can't, Theresa. See, I need it for a front. You know how the world feels toward a guy who can't put up a decent front."

"Yes, but I think you're carrying an unnecessary burden."

"Besides," he went on swiftly, "Lillian is crazy about the car. I hate to take it away from her. Not only that, if I sold it she would know we were busted and probably worry herself to death."

"Say, don't you think she ought to know how things stand? How about giving her a chance of getting out from under?"

"What?" Hubert stared dumbly at Theresa, and then

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when she did not answer he went on. "Oh, you mean give Lil a chance to get away. She don't want to go away."

"How do you know she don't? Maybe if she knew things were so bad, she'd want to clear out."

"Oh, no. Besides, things ain't so terrible when I got the offer of a good job and I still got the Packard."

"Don't you own any property up your way?"

"Sure. Lots of it. But, see, Helen would find out about it and know that I was keeping somebody when she saw how much money I've been through."

"Well, suppose Helen did find out? She couldn't do more than divorce you."

"Oh, Helen's a kind of sad case, Theresa. You know, old and settled and still crazy about me. I couldn't hurt her that much."

"No, I suppose not." Theresa said nothing more for a time. Hubert talked on about Helen's pitiable condition. Presently Theresa interrupted him to ask, "Is Lillian feeling low-spirited?"

"Very."

"What's she low-spirited about if she don't know how badly off you are?"

"Well, of course, she knows that we haven't money for clothes and parties and things like that. The only thing is that she thinks this is all going to be over right away."

"Isn't it?"

Hubert cast his eyes upward. "God knows," he said.

"But I thought you had a good job right around the corner."

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"I have, but whether I'll take it or not is another matter."

"What would make you refuse it?"

"Too small a salary."

"But you're getting nothing now and you're managing somehow," Theresa pointed out.

Hubert reached for one of Theresa's cigarettes. He was glad that he wasn't married to Theresa. Helen had been a much better choice. This damn woman should have been a district attorney.

Theresa sat tapping her left foot thoughtfully on the floor. Many thoughts went through her head. Hymie worked so hard for his money, poor soul. It wasn't fair to give it away to a guy who sat on his can and hoped for the best. Still, what would become of Lillian if Hubert decided that he couldn't possibly be annoyed with the affair any longer? What was to prevent him from suddenly departing, to return no more? And maybe Lillian cared about this jackass. There was no accounting for tastes. Perhaps a hundred dollars would last him till he got a job. But maybe he had no intentions of getting one. Maybe he'd just break away from Lillian one of these days and go back to wherever the devil he came from. Well, if he was that kind, a hundred dollars wasn't going to keep him from leaving Lillian flat. But maybe it would keep him with her a little longer, and if she loved Hubert— Oh, there was no figuring the thing, but anyhow—

"Wait a minute," she said. "I'll get dressed and you can drive me to the bank."

"I can get a check cashed," he said.

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"We have no checks," she answered. "We're poor people."

Hubert held his tongue after that. He said not another word until Theresa had drawn a hundred dollars from her account and handed it to him. He said "thank you" then. They were on Dyckman Street outside the Bank of Washington Heights. Hubert was uncomfortable. Suppose Lillian should walk by?

"Get in, I'll drive you home."

"No, I think I'll walk over and see Lillian. Cheer her up a little."

"You won't tell her about this, will you, Theresa? I don't want to worry her, you know, about debts we owe, and especially to you."

"Why especially to me?"

"Oh, she'd think I was awful, picking on her friends to borrow from."

Theresa laughed and walked away. Hubert decided that he didn't like her; still, he had a hundred dollars now and it felt darn nice to have it, too. Maybe before the hundred dollars dwindled he'd have a job. He'd written to Box 247X in answer to an advertisement that called for an intelligent man over thirty to fill an executive position. Everything looked quite rosy. There only remained the thinking up of a story to tell Lillian concerning the hundred dollars. Well, he'd say that the week his son had started work he had given a hundred dollars to him with which to buy a suit and a coat. Given it to him, of course, not loaned it. But the darn kid was so perky now and so tickled to death with being a business man that he had insisted upon returning it.

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That was a good story. Now what would he do with the rest of the day? Let's see, where was that Vilma Banky picture playing?

Box 247X never answered Hubert's letter. Well, it probably wouldn't have been much of a job anyhow. He felt that he ought to get up to the club again and tell a few more fellows that he was open for offers, but he remembered that he owed a little money up there and sort of hated to go back till he could pay it. He looked through the ads in the paper every morning after he had left Lillian. He would buy the papers on Dyckman Street and park on the Drive, looking them over. There were, however, very few ads that would appeal to a man of intelligence and executive ability. And fewer still that wanted answers by mail. Hubert was not interested in the ones that wanted a personal interview at once. He couldn't see himself in line with a lot of down-and-outers asking a perfect stranger to give him a job. The ads that spoke of glittering opportunities for the right man always had box numbers; so Hubert wrote to three or four, but received no answer. His wonderment knew no bounds.

The hundred dollars which Theresa gave him did not last long, as there were many claims upon it. Hubert thought of selling the Packard and then beating it out of town with Lillian and beginning everything over. He thought of it as one thinks of a play one has seen. Very entertaining, indeed, and very competently handled, too, but of course, no one ever behaved like the hero. Still, a very nice story to recall now and again.

Only ten dollars was left of Theresa's hundred when

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the gas company threatened to discontinue service in the little kitchenette. Lillian had always been careless about paying bills, and when there had been plenty of money at hand no inconvenience had arisen from her neglect. It had been easy to pay the fellow when he showed up with the final notice. But now it was different. Very different. Five dollars and twenty-one cents takes an awful fall out of one's last ten-dollar bill.

Hubert considered the matter. Certainly he wasn't going to pay out of that solitary bill, and the gas was needed very badly. He got his hat and went out.

At the Dyckman Street corner he paused and considered the matter. The sun was hot. He took off his hat and fanned himself idly. The sun sparkled on the plate-glass windows of the stores across the way. Hm, there was the butcher shop they used to deal in. Nice fellow, that butcher. Very obliging. Briskly Hubert crossed the street.

It was a long, narrow store with plump chickens and tender-looking roasts displayed on white enamel trays under glass. Hubert saw that the owner of the shop who had always given him his personal attention was at the moment engaged. A somewhat fussy young woman was picking out a few lamb chops and Hubert waited patiently for the butcher to notice him.

The fussy young woman was at last satisfied and took her bundle and departed.

"Howdy," said Hubert.

"Why, hello, Mr. Cory," said the butcher. "You're quite a stranger. Been away?"

"Yes, we were away for a while. My wife was

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awfully sick, you know. I had to take her to the mountains."

"Is that so?"

"Yeh, I thought there for a while that I was going to lose her."

"You don't say."

"It was pretty bad, all right, but we've got her around pretty well now."

"I often wondered about her. Never saw her around or anything. I figured you moved out of the neighborhood."

"Oh, no. You can't lose us. We're like the bad pennies that always turn up."

"I asked Marty here a couple of times if he thought we'd done anything you folks didn't like. You know, some folks are strange. I thought maybe you got a tough piece of meat once or something. You know accidents can happen, and some folks don't know they're accidents."

"Oh, no. Nothing like that. Say, I always said you carried the best line of meat I ever ate and that the service here was good, too."

"Well, I'm glad to hear you say that, Mr. Cory. I don't like to lose a good customer."

"Don't worry. You haven't lost us. It's only that we were away and when we got back I wouldn't let my wife do any cooking or housework. You know how those things are. But I'm pretty tired of restaurants now, and so is she. I guess you'll be getting a ring from us some day next week asking you to send over a good thick steak."

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"Ha, ha. Well, glad to hear that."

"Say, could you cash a check for me?"

"Sure. Wouldn't be the first one I cashed for you."

"It sure would not. This is a little large though. Three hundred and fifteen dollars."

"Oh, say, I'm sorry, Mr. Cory, I really am. I haven't got that much."

"Gee, and it's too late for the bank and here I am flat broke. I wanted to take Mrs. Cory to a show to-night, too. The poor girl just wanted to see one tonight. It's so long since she's been able to go."

"Well, now, that's too bad. Say, I could let you have some money, Mr. Cory. How much would do you?"

"Twenty or twenty-five would be great."

"All right. Here's twenty-five. Five, ten, fifteen, twenty, yes, twenty-five. I hope that'll help you."

"Oh, that'll be fine. I'll be in tomorrow to see you about it."

"No hurry, Mr. Cory, no hurry. I won't lose any sleep worrying about it. Ha, ha."

"Ha, ha," echoed Hubert.

He went across the street. He looked back at the butcher shop and saw the obliging little butcher standing in his doorway. He looked clean and cheerful there. Nice fellow. Probably rolling in money. Sure, all those guys were rolling in money. Well, maybe not rolling, but they got along all right. Hubert decided that when things were breaking right again he'd bring the butcher a couple of good cigars and the twenty-five bucks and tell how broke he'd been and how the big check had just been a stall. They'd have a good laugh together

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over it. Hubert remembered Carl Feldman just then and frowned. No use in worrying about Carl. That guy was making plenty of jack. Besides, Carl knew that a fellow like Hubert Scott wasn't going to rook him for a lousy hundred bucks.

He was two doors away from his apartment before he remembered that he had no plausible story to tell Lillian that would explain the presence of this twenty-five dollars. She'd never believe that he had just walked out and found it lying on the street. Not even if he went over to Woolworth's and bought a little purse to put it in. No, that story would seem a little far-fetched, he was afraid. Gee, he hated to be lying to Lillian all the time, but there was no use of her worrying about debts. He'd tell her everything when he got a job. He'd even tell her about Theresa then. But now let's see—he had only been gone about fifteen minutes; so she'd know that the money had come from somewhere in the neighborhood. That made it bad. Maybe he ought to get the car and ride around for an hour. But she saw him now. Damn it. There she was up at the window. He smiled at her and entered the house. Now who in the devil could he have met? Billy? What was the use of giving Billy credit for having returned a loan? Cliff? The same went for Cliff.

He walked upstairs. Lillian had opened the door and was standing there waiting for him.

"Gee," she said, "it's roasting in here tonight."

"Yeh, it's pretty hot. Anyhow you can put one worry off your mind. We'll have twenty-five dollars this evening and we can pay the gas bill."

KEPT WOMAN

"How's that?"

"Well, I called up a fellow. Jack Roberts, his name is. He belongs to the club. A nice fellow. Long about a year ago—yes, I guess it was just about a year ago he borrowed twenty-five bucks from me. I hate to ask a fellow about any money I've loaned him, but, gee, when you need it you need it. I called him up and he says he's going downtown tonight and will stop and give me the money."

"Here?"

"Gosh, no. He knows Helen. I'm to meet him at Broadway and Dyckman Street. I told him I was down here attending to some business and that I ran a little short."

"Won't he tell Helen?"

"Well, that don't matter. See, if she says anything I can say I was doing some business for Steve Flynn."

"You know," Lillian said, "sometimes I think Helen must be awfully thick."

"Why?"

"Because. For instance, now, where does she think you sleep every night?"

"Sometimes in a hotel and sometimes at Steve's house. I tell her I'm too tired to make that leap home every evening. She never asks what hotel. She trusts me."

"I wonder if you couldn't really get a good job with Steve Flynn?"

"No. I saw him about it. Close? Why, that guy's closer than all the Scotchmen they tell jokes about. He wanted me to start at thirty-five hundred a year."

"Heavens!"

KEPT WOMAN

Hubert took a little walk at a quarter of eight, and when he came back he gave Lillian the twenty-five dollars.

"You know," she said, "I didn't believe that fellow would show up. I'm pleasantly surprised to see the money. You know what I figured? I thought he'd figure that you didn't really need the money bad and he'd just let it ride."

"Oh, no. I've never known Jack Roberts to say that he'd be at a certain place and then not show up. He's a nice chap. I'd have had you meet him only on account of him knowing Helen I couldn't."

"Of course not."

The gas bill was paid and Hubert and Lillian got their trip to the shore. They breathed the ocean air, got sand in their shoes, and ate a huge shore dinner. It seemed queer to them to be here alone. Last year the Fishers had sat with them at this same table and there had been much conversation and laughter. Lillian and Hubert talked hardly at all, and neither said anything which caused the other to even smile. Lillian thought that the beaches were falling off dreadfully. One used to actually enjoy them. She thought perhaps they were cutting prices and letting the common element in. That always ruined a place.

Hubert paid the check and they started for home. It was a long ride and the traffic was heavy. Lillian wanted to drive. She felt sure that she could make the trip more swiftly than Hubert. He always permitted every car on the road to get in front of him and he shunned every short cut. When she ventured that per-

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haps he was tired and would like her to drive, he answered sharply. He had grown very funny about the Packard, she thought. He never let her touch it any more although it was older now and certainly not as well cared for.

He sat at the wheel of his wife's car and thought his thoughts. Certainly he was going to have to repeat on somebody. Somebody who had already loaned him money was going to have to do it again.

By morning he had decided to whom he would turn a second time. He had a faint suspicion that Carl Feldman would turn him down. The McKay Brothers probably would, too. Besides, they wanted to know too much. He didn't want to go to the club. There were a couple of fellows there who would probably ask him point-blank to return what he had borrowed. There was only Theresa. She might turn him down, too. But you couldn't have a fellow arrested for asking. He kind of hated to ask Theresa again. She might think he had an awful nerve. But, hell, who was he going to ask? And if she turned him down what in the name of God was he going to do?

He appeared at Theresa's apartment promptly at noon. He rang her bell and got a warm smile ready for her. Nothing happened. She was out. Hubert's smile disappeared. Women nowadays thought of nothing but gadding about. He decided to wait awhile. He had nothing to do anyhow. He took his newspaper out of his pocket and carefully separated the help-wanted sheet from the news section and laid it on the fourth

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step. He sat down and at once became engrossed in the baseball news.

At a quarter of one Theresa came up the steps with her arms full of bundles. She looked at him without surprise this time.

"Hold this, will you, till I get my key out?" She handed him a large moist bundle on the top of which peaches and oranges fought for space. There were string-beans and lettuce in the bag, too. Hubert saw them when the bag broke. The accident occurred in Theresa's kitchen; so it was not as annoying as it would have been on the steps. Hubert called her attention to the fact that the bag *could* have broken out there, but she continued to swear violently at the fruit and vegetables and he decided that she was just hot and tired.

She put meat in the ice-box but left the other things on the table. They went to the living-room then. Theresa threw her hat on the gate-leg table and lit a cigarette. She was frowning deeply and made no effort to open the conversation.

Hubert said, "Awfully hot today, isn't it?"

"Yes," Theresa agreed.

"Thought it was cool in the hall there. I'd only been waiting about five minutes when you came along."

"Is that all?"

"That's all."

Hymie was soft. Too soft. He had said, "Gee, Theresa, I don't think he's a bad fellow. Dumb, but not mean or anything. I'm glad you gave him the hundred bucks. If he comes back don't turn him down. Of

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course if he keeps coming, we'll have to. But we could stand one more touch." Theresa tightened her lips. Hymie was too soft.

"Theresa," Hubert said, "I wish I had come here today to pay you the money I owe you. But don't worry, I will pay it. Soon now. Fact is I came to ask you today if I could borrow a little more. I'm flat as hell, Theresa. I need another hundred."

"Honest, Hubert, I'll be frank with you. I don't see how you have the crust to drive that Packard up here and ask me to lend you money. Hymie and I have a little money. We're not starving, but I'll be damned if we consider ourselves in a position to support that kind of a car. You have a nerve, Hubert."

He ran his hand nervously over his face. "Yes, I know I have, Theresa. You're right in bawling me out. I'm not the kind of a guy that has nerve as a rule either. I wouldn't dream of coming to you this time or the other time and asking you for money if I hadn't promised to support Lil."

"But *I* didn't promise to support her."

"No, I know you didn't. But I know you like her. Nobody could help but like her. She's so good-hearted and even-tempered. I figured you for her friend and you'd be the last one—next to me—who'd want to see her in trouble."

"How about that job you nearly had?"

"They took another fellow for it."

"Why?"

"He—he could speak Italian."

"What kind of a job was it?"

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"Why—it had a lot to do with interviewing Italians."

Theresa stared at him, and he grew uncomfortable and fidgeted in the chair.

"I think you should sell that Packard today," she said.

"Then where would I be?" he wailed.

"Probably eight or nine hundred dollars ahead. Do you like being flat broke?"

"No, but I'd never get a job if I didn't look prosperous."

"You haven't gotten one looking prosperous," she said, cruelly. "On the other hand a great many fellows without Packards have been known to connect with jobs."

"Yes, but, Theresa, I'd have to explain to Helen."

"Tell her you got tired of the car. After all, it isn't her business."

"Oh," Hubert groaned. "You don't understand."

"No, I'm pretty thick."

"I didn't mean that. Theresa, for the love of God, if you can spare a hundred dollars let me have it. I'll pay you back. Honestly I will. I'll give you a hundred percent interest on the two hundred before the winter months. You'll see, I'll connect with something."

"Don't talk like that, Hubert. I'm not lending you money as a business venture, you know. Come on, drive me down to the bank and I'll let you have it. But I don't give a God-damn what happens to you after this. Don't you dare ask me for any more money while you have that car."

"All right, Theresa. Thank you." There was defeat

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in his tone. She had the feeling that he would have cried had she kept him in suspense a minute longer. Did Lillian believe that he was going to have money to scatter again—or did she love the poor sap? The question occupied Theresa all the way to the bank and back. She gave Hubert the money outside her own door.

“Thanks, Theresa. Thanks a lot. Say, you won’t—you won’t mention this to Lillian either, will you?”

“No,” she said shortly.

“Thanks, Theresa.”

He drove away then. That was the day Hubert first saw Emil Jannings. He liked him a lot, too.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

LILLIAN met the first of August alone. Hubert had spent the preceding night with his wife and son. He had felt that he really ought to do it. Helen's aunt from Wheeling was visiting and he thought it only decent to put in an appearance at least once. Helen hadn't asked him to, but that was probably because she thought him extremely busy. She'd be tickled to death at his thoughtfulness.

Lillian fished the electric bill out of the mail-box and met the rent collector on the stairs as she returned to her own apartment.

"How do you do, Mrs. Cory," he said pleasantly. "I'll get to you in about fifteen minutes. Will you be in?"

"Yes, I'll be in, but I—my husband is out and he forgot to leave the rent."

"Oh, I see. What time will he be back?"

"Not till late. After dinner."

"Around seven?"

"Eight's more like it."

"Well, I'll stop around about eight-thirty."

The rent collector marked a memorandum on his little pad. Lillian walked past him and up the stairs. Her cheeks felt hot and she was breathless. The rent collector would be back that evening. Suppose Hubert

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didn't have the money? He could get it, of course. If worst came to worst he could probably borrow from somebody. But very likely he wouldn't have it that evening. That would mean another visit from the collector. That was a disgrace. Lillian had been reared to believe that nothing was more disgraceful than not having one's rent on the first of the month. She remembered Mrs. Egan—a dim shadow from out of her childhood. Mrs. Egan had never had her rent on the first. One month the rent collector had come eleven times. Lillian remembered because her mother had spoken of it later.

Oh, if the landlord only knew Hubert! If he only realized that Hubert was not the same as his other tenants. Thirty-five dollars was nothing to him. The rent was ridiculously small. Only just now, of course, there was a little slump in Hubert's fortunes. She wondered if she could write well enough to convey to the landlord some inkling of Hubert's real status. How he had given money away like nothing. How he would soon be able to do so again. She sat at her window looking down into the hot street and wondering what sort of person the landlord was. Probably an impossible sort who would be more impressed by regular payment of that insignificant rent than by anything she could say of Hubert.

The sun glittered on the pavement and women rocked baby-carriages and fanned themselves and talked. Children fell and their mothers spanked them. Across the street there was another woman sitting at her window looking at the doings on the street. Lillian wondered if that woman had her rent ready to hand the collector. If she hadn't she could sell that ring that the sun kept

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picking out to glisten upon. It seemed pretty big. But of course from a distance one couldn't tell, and maybe it was a fake.

Oh! Lillian suddenly thought of something. She raised her hand and examined the ring which Hubert had given her almost two years before. It had twenty diamonds, but they were very small. Still they looked like good diamonds, and there were those four strips of sapphire. It must be worth something. It was impossible for her to make a guess at its value. At different times she had appraised it all the way from fifty dollars to five hundred. At any rate she could certainly get thirty-five for it, and that would see the rent paid. And paid this evening. She hated to part with the ring. She was fond of it. Still, the hot months of inactivity and bad business would soon be over. In the autumn things would loosen up, business men would become brisk and wide awake. They would take on other men to help them meet the prosperous money-spending months. Hubert could get a position then and he would buy her another ring. Maybe a better one.

Lillian decided not to sell the ring unless the pawning value was too small. She had to have thirty-five dollars. Even a little more would be handy. There was the electric bill and always the little matter of eating.

She wished that she had her Nash. She hated to use the subway on a hot day like this. It would be so convenient to dash down in the roadster. But then if she had the roadster, she remembered, there would be no occasion for going downtown today.

She felt that there really must be pawn-shops on One

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Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street. In reconsidering the matter, however, she decided that she would go farther downtown. There was a greater possibility of meeting some one she knew in Harlem.

On Eighth Avenue in the Forties Lillian found pawn-shops. She was diffident about entering. What did you say to the man? Did you have to have proof that the article really belonged to you?

She stood before one shop for several minutes, pretending to admire the display of stringed instruments. Actually she was waiting for a moment when there would be nobody passing. It would be awful to have people staring at her as she walked into a pawn-shop. People continued to pass. Inside the shop the pawnbroker watched Lillian, though he seemed to be tinkering with the inside of a wrist watch. Acquainted with the foibles and follies of human nature, the pawnbroker knew what Lillian was waiting for. He in turn waited for her to realize that people would pass his shop all day in endless procession.

At last he heard the door open. He looked up at her as she advanced toward the counter.

"Hot, isn't it?" he said unexpectedly.

"I should say so," Lillian returned. She slipped the ring off her finger and laid it before him. She began to giggle. The pawnbroker was not surprised. Many people laughed and asked just as she asked, carelessly and just as though it didn't matter, "How much can I get for that—fifteen cents?"

He looked at her as he reached for the ring. Plump, shabby, too much makeup. Pretty anyhow and young.

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Not an actress. Not a bum. He couldn't place her and he was annoyed.

He peered at the ring through the jeweler's glass. "Hm," he said, "what are those?"

"What?" asked Lillian in alarm.

"The blue things."

"Sapphires."

"Yeh? Well, I'm not so young any more. I can't keep up with everything. I suppose they're a new kind of sapphire."

"Maybe," said Lillian innocently.

"They look like glass to me."

"Oh," she said. "The diamonds are all right, aren't they?"

For answer he tossed the ring on the round rubber pad. "I'll give you fifty dollars," he said. "I'm a fool to do it, but maybe it'll change my luck. Business is rotten in the heat."

He gave Lillian fifty dollars in five-dollar bills. She turned to walk out then, but he called her back.

"Don't you expect to redeem it?" he asked.

"What?"

"Don't you expect to get it out any more?"

"Yes. Sure I do. Why?"

"You'll need a ticket."

He made the ticket out for her with a large 50 on it in indelible ink. "Here," he said.

"Thank you."

"Performer?" he asked.

"What?"

"Are you a performer? Are you on the stage?"

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"No." Lillian smiled with pleasure. "What could I do on the stage?" she asked him as though he were urging her to go in for a career.

The pawnbroker shrugged. "I don't know what you could do," he said. "I was just wondering."

"No," Lillian said again. She looked in her bag to be sure that the money and the ticket were safe. She went out then, very well satisfied with the outcome of her adventure.

Hubert was waiting for her when she reached home. He was sitting in the chair by the window, mopping at his forehead with a large grayish handkerchief.

"Hello," he said. "Where were you?"

"Out."

"You wouldn't kid me, would you? I thought you were hiding under the bed."

"Don't be sore. Got any money?"

"No. Why?"

"Today's rent day."

"Gee, I forgot all about it." His pale eyes dreamed down at the street below. "Well, don't worry, Lil. You know I can get the money."

"I got it," she shouted. She had meant to break the news more gently so that the surprise would be greater.

"What? You got it? How?" He stared at her unbelievably.

"I hocked my ring."

"Which one?"

"Now, how many did I have? The one with the sapphires and diamonds, of course."

"What did you get for it?"

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"Fifty dollars," she announced proudly.

"Gee, Lil, you ought to have gotten more than that. Those fellows are supposed to give you one-third of the ring's value. I paid two hundred and forty dollars for it. You should have got sixty-five—no, you should have got eighty dollars for it."

"Just because you paid two hundred and forty dollars for it don't prove it's worth that much. Maybe you got gypped."

"Don't be silly. I got it wholesale."

"Even so," said Lillian sulkily. It's no fun to have one's surprises ruined with unkind criticism. "Anyhow we have the rent."

They waited in for the collector, who appeared promptly at eighty-thirty. Lillian handed him the money and got a receipt which she tucked carefully away in the bureau drawer. In the other house she hadn't saved receipts. She saved them now. Poverty makes you mistrust people.

They went to the movies for the nine o'clock show. Lillian didn't feel like going, but Hubert insisted.

"Hell, what's the use of sitting here?" he argued. "It's cooler in the movies and it takes my mind off my troubles for a while."

Lillian said nothing. She went to comb her hair. His troubles. She hated him to admit that there were troubles. Things were more easily coped with if they were not mentioned or at most referred to lightly.

Cliff and Anna were at the theater. Lillian saw them sitting in the next to the last row, gazing up at the picture. She did not mention to Hubert that the Sullivans

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were there. She was afraid that he would insist upon speaking to them. She knew that Cliff and Anna would be very pleasant and polite, but she had no desire to force herself upon them.

After the picture Lillian and Hubert stopped and had ice cream. They took a short walk then. When it was impossible to prolong their absence further they returned to their stifling little apartment and went to bed.

Lillian paid her electric bill next day. Instead of mailing the money she delivered it in person. It was something to do. The days were so long and there was never anything to do but sit at her window and hope. She had tried walking on Dyckman and Two Hundred and Seventh Street, but she found no pleasure in these walks. She kept her eyes turned from the dress and millinery shops lest she see something desirable and unattainable. The other shops bored her. She cared nothing for marquissette curtains, books, or hardware. She thought of walking along the Drive but decided that would be a bore, too, with no one to talk to. There were buses running from One Hundred and Eighty-First Street down to Washington Square. She knew that many women spent the afternoon taking the ride down and back perched on top of the bus. But that was not for Lillian, who trusted no one's driving but her own. She thought often of her roadster and Louise and shopping and everything that used to make her afternoons fly.

She came home from paying her electric bill and undressed. She bathed and slipped on her kimono, then

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took her seat at the window. Those women down in the street with their kids, now—they were probably busy every minute. No time to hope or fear or anything else. She knew now that babies got orange juice. The mothers on this street attended to a great many of their children's needs outdoors.

The trim, clean little Essex drove up to the door and Lillian jumped up and waved eagerly to Theresa. She was deeply touched by Theresa's kindness and quiet faithfulness. She had a hard way about her. She wouldn't lie to save your feelings like some people would, but she was there when you needed her.

Theresa came in and pushed her hat up off her forehead. It balanced itself at a crazy angle and made Theresa look like an imbecile. "Gee, it's hot," she said.

"You can sing that," Lillian agreed. "I was down to pay my electric bill and when I came back I jumped right in a cold bath."

"That's what I'm going to do when I get home. I just stopped in to say hello."

"What have you been doing?"

"Not a thing. Too damn hot."

"You said it. We went to the movies last night. We saw Harold Lloyd. He was funny. Cliff and Anna were there."

"Speak to them?"

"Go on. I'm not going to make people talk to me if they don't want to. Have you seen them lately—or the Fishers?"

"I saw Louise last night. She came over and borrowed some forks. She's giving a party tonight."

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"Going?"

"No. Here's a laugh. She didn't invite me."

"No kidding."

"I swear she didn't. Isn't that a scream? She borrowed a dozen forks and turned down my best tablecloth—because it wasn't white; it's ecru openwork lace, you know—and didn't invite me."

"Who's going? Have you any idea?"

"Yes. Friends of Billy's."

"Radio people?"

"Well, that's what Louise wanted me to believe, but I think they're paint salesmen. She's in a new apartment, you know."

"Oh, yes. Where?"

"West side. Bennett Avenue."

"That's fine. I'll go see her often."

"Yes. You and me both. I hope I get my forks back."

"You won't; so don't worry about them."

"I won't, heh? You don't know me."

Yes, Theresa did look pretty capable and prosperous, too. Of course an Essex wasn't a Packard. Still, Theresa got everywhere she wanted to go and wasn't starving to pay garage rent. Lillian liked the way her friend was dressed today. She had on a white flannel pleated skirt, a white sweater, and a white felt hat that was cut high above the eyebrows and low on the neck. Then on her feet were bright green kid pumps. Theresa had white pumps, but it amused her to wear the unexpected. When she did that she felt that she was outwitting the part of her nature that wrangled with fruit dealers over a nickel.

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Yes, Theresa looked prosperous and she had been a friend, too. An idea was forming in Lillian's mind. Maybe Hubert wouldn't like it. Still there was really no harm in it and soon they would be able to fix it all up again.

"Gee, Theresa, this has been a terrible summer for me. We've been so broke. I'm going to ask you something. I just thought of it and you can say no without hurting my feelings if you want to say no. It's a terrible nerve, I know, but, honest, you're my only friend. Theresa, could you lend me some money?"

Theresa studied the tips of her green slippers. Three times she started to speak, then seemed to think better of it. At last she asked, "Lillian, will you believe me if I say that I can't afford it?"

Lillian smiled. "Sure, Theresa, I understand," she said.

"No, no, that isn't what I mean at all. You're understanding the wrong thing. You're understanding that I don't want to lend you the money and that I'm just stalling. That isn't it, Lillian, honest to God, it isn't."

"No, of course not. I know what you mean."

"I don't think you do. Truly, Lillian, if I could afford it I'd lend you a thousand dollars, but I'm stuck. I can't afford it. Honest, I can't."

"That's all right, Theresa. Don't feel so bad about it."

"Well, I do. I hate to turn you down, Lillian. You can't know how I feel about this. Gee, if I could afford it, you could have it. God, I'm placed in a funny position."

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"Why?"

"Oh, this turning you down. It must look to you as though I claimed to be your friend and then turned out to be like the rest when I'm needed."

"No. I understand, Theresa. Honest I do."

But Theresa only shook her head and murmured, "I wish I could afford to lend you money just to prove that I'm not hot air."

"Oh, it's all right. We'll get along."

"Look, Lillian, maybe I can show you I'm your friend yet. Come to my house and stay as long as you like. I have that couch and you can stay till you get work and save up enough to get on your feet again."

"Gee, that's nice of you, Theresa. I appreciate that, really I do. But you know men are funny. I think Hubert would rather we had our own place, lousy as it is."

Theresa said, "To tell you the truth, Lillian, the invitation didn't include Hubert."

"Oh." Lillian's mouth hardened and grew thin. "Did you think I'd walk out on him because he's broke?"

"He couldn't call it walking out on him when you've stood it for six months."

"If he's got to stand it longer I can stand it too."

"Look, let's be sensible. That means unpleasant. Did you ever stop to consider that your Hubert goes home every so often and gets his belly full of good food? That he's too damn stubborn to sell the Packard and make things easier for you? You're not doing him any good by being here, and he's not doing you any good. You'd be better off away from him."

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"He spent his money on me and my friends, didn't he?"

"Suppose he did. He got paid for it. You've given him damn near two years of your life." Theresa had never seen Lillian argumentative before or with hot, red cheeks. She knew that Lillian was sore at her, but she was set on saying what she thought. She said, "He can stand this place better than you can. No, not because he's a man. That's story-book stuff. Men aren't braver than women. He can stand it because he gets a rest from it occasionally. He can go home and probably sleep in a damn fine house. Where can you go? Not only that, but he has that house to think of in dark moments. He can go there to stay, Lillian, if worst comes to worst. Did you ever think of that?"

"No."

"Well, think of it now. See things my way."

"Why?"

"Because I'm right. He wanted you and he got you. You owe him nothing."

"Would you feel that way about Hymie? If Hymie couldn't provide for you tomorrow would you feel free to leave him flat?"

"No."

"Because some mug said hocus-pocus Latin or Hebrew—or however you were married—over you. You think if a girl isn't married to a man she's so low that a few lousy, stinking tricks won't make her any worse."

"Lillian, you *know* I'm not like that. You're talking damn foolishness. I wouldn't feel justified in leaving Hymie because that boy has worked for me. We're

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married since I'm eighteen. That's eight years. Three of those years he spent in a factory, and once, believe it or not, he was a bus boy in a restaurant for a month. He's earned a right to expect me to stick through thick and thin."

"I don't believe you, Theresa. I think you're expecting me to break loose just because I'm not married to Hubert."

"You insult me, Lillian."

"To hell with that. You insult me, too, when you think I'm the kind that goes with a fellow's bank roll."

"Why doesn't Hubert sell that Packard?"

"Theresa, I don't even consider that *my* business."

"All right, Lillian. I just want to help you. I—"

"I don't want any help from you, Theresa. Anybody who doesn't include Hubert when they're dealing out favors don't have to help me."

"Oh, you God-damn fool, Lillian Cory." Theresa stopped and began to cry. "What the hell," she said. "I'll be going."

She went. Lillian from the window saw the sun glinting on Theresa's gay little green slippers. She heard the car start and she leaned out of her window and was still watching when it turned the corner.

"I guess she was the best friend I ever had," Lillian thought. "She always seemed so decent and square. Gee, I'd even thought she was the kind a person could depend on."

CHAPTER TWENTY

HUBERT sat at the window and meditated on the malignancy of fate. As though things hadn't been bad enough he had had to catch a cold. In August, no less, with the sun hotter than hell and not a breeze stirring, he had caught a cold. His doleful sigh ended in a sneeze. Damn the luck. And colds were no joke either. God, how sick they made a fellow feel. He probably wouldn't be able to go out tomorrow, and he really ought to go out. He had to dig up some money somewhere. There was only two or three dollars left from Lillian's ring. They had been fools to go to the movies and eat thick lamb chops. They ought to have conserved a little. Funny how he couldn't get used to being poor. Some people were born to have money to throw about and he was one of them. Now, with a cold like this he ought to be in bed. Not in that bed inside. Oh, the bed wasn't so bad, but the room. He ought to be in a large, airy room, just resting. Every once in a while somebody could bring him some tea and toast. Even a poached egg or a very tender bit of steak. It was nice to lie on a soft bed between cool, crisp sheets. Especially if you were sick. Hubert sneezed again.

Lillian, lying on the couch, eyed him with ever-increasing dismay. That was a bad cold he had. Poor Hubert. She had heard that summer colds were very hard to cure and more dangerous than those contracted

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in cold weather. It never rains but what it don't pour. He was probably going to be real sick now. She turned her head away from him and gazed up into the light. It was only twenty watts; so it didn't hurt to look into it. She felt very low. The last lap is always the hardest, she told herself; that was why she felt so despondent. The trouble was nearly over now and instead of being cheerful she was fagged with the effort and low-spirited. Next month would be September. That was the month when people began to do things. Wasn't it fortunate that she hadn't been blue and melancholy earlier when there was so much yet to face? She tried to cheer herself up by planning her new apartment. It would probably be November first when she took it. There was no sense moving the minute Hubert got a job. They would save a bit first. She thought that this time she would furnish her bedroom in maple. She had seen a picture in a magazine of a bedroom furnished in maple and it had looked swell. It would be fun to walk right out of this place and leave everything behind. The new apartment would be waiting for her all freshly furnished and clean. Maybe she'd move in that new building that was going up at—

Hubert sneezed again and Lillian sighed and forgot her plans for the new apartment. A summer cold was serious. He ought to take something. She wanted to ask him how he felt. He probably would say that he felt all right and that would cheer her up. Only that might start a conversation, and it was too hot and she hadn't the energy for conversation. Maybe if she took a cold

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bath. But, Lord, what a nuisance, drawing the water and everything.

There was a far-away growl of thunder. Now they'd have rain. Maybe that would cool it off some. Her mother had always said that rain made it hotter. She would say something different from what everybody else said. Lillian wondered what the old lady would be doing tonight. Probably roasting like everybody else. Oh, well, the summer was a beautiful time if you could spend it like the rich people do. Just lying around all day in the sand at Long Beach.

There was a mosquito on the ceiling. He would fly around her head after the light was out and she was trying to sleep. Life was just chuckful of things like that. Hubert was blowing his nose now. Maybe they had something in the house that was good for a cold. What was good for a cold? A handkerchief. Gee, she'd made a joke. She thought of telling it to Hubert but decided it wasn't quite funny enough to justify the exertion.

Somebody's radio was blaring frightfully. Evidently somebody was in the mood for that sort of thing. God, how could they be on a night like this? The ice wouldn't last till morning and the butter would be all soft and nasty at breakfast.

Hubert thought his thoughts. Here he was sick and broke. Things couldn't go on this way. Only a fool let himself get so broke that he was in actual want. There was no use stalling around any longer. He'd have to pull himself together and stop chasing after fellows to

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lend him money. Now it was time to *do* something. Tomorrow morning he'd go ask Helen for money.

It would take courage all right, but, hell, he wasn't afraid of her. He needed the money. God, he couldn't just be left to starve to death or die of this cold. He'd have to see a doctor. Maybe he was getting pneumonia or flu or any one of those deadly things. A fellow had to look out for his health.

He'd ask Helen for a lot of money. Not because he really needed a lot—hell, there'd be a job along any minute now, providing he was well enough to take it—but because Helen would be snooty toward a person who asked for a hundred dollars and respectful toward one who asked for a thousand. He'd make her respect him good and plenty. He'd ask for five thousand dollars. He'd talk like Rockefeller. He'd tell her that he had a chance to make a good investment, only he was short five thousand dollars. That would make a hit with her. She was always in favor of investments. She'd probably ask him what he was going to invest in. He'd have to make something up. Well, that wouldn't be hard. What the hell, she might as well give the money to him as let it lie around idle or spend it on the kid. She was making a regular softie of the boy anyhow by spending too much on him and making life too easy for him. She had gotten rid of the Oakland and bought the kid a Studebaker. He was probably earning twenty bucks a week and there he was driving around in a swell new car. Helen was foolish about some things. Well, she could be a little foolish for him. It wouldn't hurt her. He'd pay the five thousand back to her with interest

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before long. He'd buy a great big box of candy and put the check inside the box. Then he'd hand her the candy and say, "Sorry, Helen, I can't pay you your money, but here's a box of candy for you." And just about the time she began to rave she'd find the check and feel like a plug nickel.

Hubert was so delighted with the whole idea that he smiled over at Lillian, but she had her eyes closed.

He said, "Lil."

She opened her eyes and waited for him to state what was on his mind.

"Say, Lil, don't lie around as though a calamity had happened. Let's be a little cheerful. Make some coffee, will you?"

"Coffee! In this heat?"

"Well, we could ice it."

"With what we have in the ice-box you couldn't ice a thimbleful of coffee. This has been a hot day, you know."

"Well, let's do something a little cheerful."

"Like what?"

"Get dressed and we'll take a walk."

"Go on! You ought to go to bed. You're a sick fellow. I've been listening to you sneezing and everything. Come on, we'll turn in."

"It isn't ten o'clock yet."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Nothing, I suppose, only all of a sudden I feel like doing something to cheer us up a little."

"You must be feverish," said Lillian.

He laughed. "Well, if I'm feverish, I'd better stay

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feverish all the rest of my life, because I get some swell ideas."

"Like what, for instance?"

"Like the one I just got."

"What one?"

"That we should be cheerful."

"Oh."

He laughed again. "Come on, Lil, brighten up a little bit."

"I'm all right," she said irritably.

"No, you're not. You got a face a mile long."

"Well, I'm warm."

"So am I, but I'm not crying about it, am I?"

"Come on, we'd better go to sleep before I start to get mad."

"At what?"

"At you. For God's sake, it's too hot to be nagged about being cheerful. Cheerfulness is something you don't get from somebody nagging you into smiling. You're as silly as those God-damned greeting-cards that come to you about dear mother, blue skies, loving friends, and kind words."

"What's the matter with you, Lil?"

"I'm warm!" she shouted.

"Well, I'm sick and I'm trying to be cheerful."

"Keep smiling, little blue bird. Though skies are gray, be bright, for they will soon be much grayer."

"Gee, you're a fine one."

"Oh, Hubert, I'm sorry. Honest I am, but I'm so warm and uncomfortable and blue."

He looked at her in surprise. "Blue? What are you

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blue about? Nothing terrible has happened, has it? We've kept fed and housed. There isn't anything to be blue about. Maybe, for all you know, we'll be on Easy Street tomorrow night this time. Gee, if we'd been hungry and without our rent I could understand you being that way."

She said nothing because there was so much to say. He wouldn't understand how a woman needs bright sweaters and pleated silk skirts and red slippers and soft little hats with which to face the summer. The heat is oppressive only when you must live through it without the crisp materials and tropical colors that bloom in every shop. Gee, last summer she'd had a sweater she'd paid eight dollars and fifty cents for. It was a bright green and had—

"Besides," Hubert added, "I feel so rotten I should think you could act a little alive to make me feel better."

Lillian sat up and leaned over to get her shoes. They slipped on easily. They were old and stretched completely out of shape.

"There's some milk in the ice-box," she said. "I got it for the creamed beef but I didn't use it all. Want a drink of that?"

"Is there a glassful there?"

"Sure. Probably more. A pint would have been enough for the creamed beef, but the damn grocer only has quart bottles; so I had to take a quart."

"All right. Give me a glass of milk."

Lillian poured the milk out and handed it to him. It was very cold and he drank it in a single gulp. "Gee," he said, "that was fine."

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"Want some more?"

"No, that'll do."

"I think you should have drank that warm," Lillian said.

"Now's a good time to say so."

"Well, there's some more here. Want me to heat it for you?"

"No."

"It would help your cold."

"Yeh, probably help the cold all right, but it wouldn't do me any good."

"Gee, you're stubborn. Here I am trying to do something for you."

"I'll be all right. Don't worry about me."

"How can I help it? I can see you're awfully sick."

"Well, I'll be all right. I guess I can bear it as long as it doesn't get any worse."

"You should see a doctor."

"Maybe I will."

"I should think you'd borrow a little money, Hubert, from one of the men you know. You really need to see a doctor, and those friends of yours never hesitated to borrow from you."

"Well, maybe I will. I hate to, though. My father always taught me that borrowing was shameful. 'If you haven't got the money, my boy, do without,' he always used to say."

"Yes, but this is different. Gee, if you're sick you got to let up a little on being independent."

"I'll see, Lil. It's hard, though, to put your pride in your pocket and ask for money. I'm a funny duck, al-

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ways was. I hate to ask favors of people. I'll think it over, though. If I'm worse tomorrow I suppose I'll have to ask somebody for a loan."

Hubert felt very much worse in the morning. He said that every bone in his body ached, that the top of his head felt as though it was going to fly off, that he couldn't breathe, and that his chest felt congested.

Lillian put her hand on his forehead. "You aren't feverish," she said encouragingly.

He smiled humoringly at her. "No?" he asked.

"Your forehead is cool."

"So was my brother's with a temperature of one hundred and six," said Hubert, complacently.

"I think you'd better stay in."

"Now, that's dumb, just plain dumb. What am I supposed to do? Sit here and die without money for a doctor?"

"Oh, Hubert, you're not as sick as that. I can get something from the drug store and give it to you. And if the worst comes to worst we can call a doctor and tell him that we're broke. He can send a bill when we're on our feet."

"Swell chance of him doing that."

"Now you're talking dumb. You know a doctor wouldn't refuse to treat you."

"Well, I wouldn't have the crust to ask him to send the bill later."

"I would."

"Yeh, *you* would. You've got lots of nerve, haven't you?"

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"I walked into a hock shop and hocked my ring. Believe it or not, that took nerve."

"What are you going to do? Tell me you hocked your ring every three minutes for the next ten years? I know you hocked it. You don't have to keep talking about it."

"Oh, Hubert, don't be so nasty."

"Well, let me alone. I have to go out today; so there's no use telling me I ought to stay in."

Lillian said no more. She gave him his breakfast and he departed. He saw her looking down at him from the window, and his conscience smiting him, he waved to her and smiled. She was a good kid but annoying at times, like all women. She'd probably worry about him all day. But after all a cold was something to worry about, forerunner of a dozen illnesses, and he really did have a bad one. His nose was completely stopped up. He couldn't smell the nice fresh air, but he could see that it was a beautiful day. Not so hot as yesterday. Maybe if things came out all right with Helen he'd take in the ball game that afternoon.

He got the car and started toward his official home. It was nice and early. He'd probably catch Helen while she was breakfasting or dressing for golf or something.

She was not breakfasting. Had she gone already? He strode to the kitchen and found Nellie polishing silver in the pantry.

"Good morning, Mr. Scott."

"Good morning, Nellie. Has Mrs. Scott gone out?"

"No, sir. She ain't up yet."

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"Could you—er—do you think you could call her? This is about her regular breakfast time, isn't it?"

Nellie bent lower over her work. "I couldn't call her," she said. "She gets up when she's ready unless the night before she's told me to call her. I wouldn't call her for nobody."

This was a distinct and offensive challenge to his importance. Hubert couldn't let it pass unnoticed.

"I suppose because my work keeps me away you've forgotten me. I'm your employer."

"No, sir, you ain't. My employer is asleep upstairs."

"You'll be out of a job this afternoon."

Nellie laughed with a loud, free recklessness. "You so big around here, you go wake Mrs. Scott up," she said.

Hubert walked out of the kitchen. Fresh, damn dinge. Many a time he'd handed her extra dollars. Well, anyhow he remembered one time distinctly. He hated to see the poor girl put out of a position she'd had over two years, but he didn't know how else to answer her impudence. She couldn't be permitted to talk to him like that. He'd have to tell Helen. He remembered Nellie's last words to him. Well, no, he'd better let Helen sleep.

It was an hour and a half later that she came downstairs. She was wearing a kimono of printed silk. Always something different. Gee, she probably spent a barrel of jack on clothes.

She looked at him and said, "Good morning. Did you want to speak to me?"

"Yes."

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"Well, wait till I've had my breakfast, will you?"

"Sure."

"Would you like something?"

"No, I've eaten."

"All right. I won't be long."

She sailed into the dining-room and took her place at the head of the table. Nellie came to her at once and they smiled at each other with strangely intimate and understanding smiles. Hubert thought that it was no wonder that Nellie was fresh. Helen treated her as though she was an equal.

"Fried eggs, Mrs. Scott?"

"No, poached, please."

"Yes, Mrs. Scott."

All through Helen's breakfast Hubert bit his nails and kept repeating to himself the points which must be driven home when he made his request. Five thousand dollars. Great investment. Why, one of the Wall Street men told me— Helen would fall for that Wall Street business. Well, it wasn't any of her affair if he didn't invest in anything. He'd give her her five thousand dollars back some day soon. Great investment. Five thousand dollars. Why, one of the Wall Street men told me— Cripes, the way she did things was sickening. Colored table linen and glass breakfast dishes. Who did she think she was, to throw money around like that? Probably had those fool colored sheets on her bed, too. White sheets had been good enough for his mother. Five thousand dollars. Great investment. Why, one of the Wall Street men told me—

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

"HUBERT, this is too much. When you try to rob me it is just a little more than I can bear without speaking up. You have no way of returning five thousand dollars to me and in your heart you know that you haven't. Haven't you any scruples at all? You would walk out of here with five thousand dollars of my money and be utterly untroubled by the thought that you'd never be able to return it. That's robbery, Hubert. Of course you say that you'll return it, but you know perfectly well that the chances are very slim. That is, you know it if you ever face facts with yourself for a single minute.

"I can't imagine, of course, the processes of your mind. You got fifteen thousand dollars for your business. That was the most money you ever saw in your life. You sold what it had taken you twelve years to build, and being dazzled by the amount, spent it in a year's time and expected to pick money off the pavements after that. People tell me things, you see, and because I know you so well I'm able to make quite a story out of what they tell me.

"I had thought, of course, that I was being fairly decent to you. I let you come and go as you liked because I considered you as a poor, dumb animal who had a certain meaningless attachment for this house and for the boy you helped to create.

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"You haven't contributed five cents to the running of this house or to the support of Hubert since you retired. I never asked for it.

"You came here and insulted my intelligence time after time. The lies you told me were absurd, but I let you go along without arguments because I pitied you a mind that would conceive them.

"You've never considered me for a single instant. You bought a Nash roadster for your red-haired mistress on time and gave this address because you weren't using your own name in Inwood. Then you let the payments lapse once, though you had money then, and they phoned here about it.

"Oh, yes, I've known there was a woman since then. Isn't her name Cory? I supposed it was, because you were calling yourself by that name. Yes, I found that out. That was another sweet moment. Nellie told me. Fancy how I felt when she told me that the boy she goes dancing with saw you at all hours of the day and night with a plump, red-haired girl. He was washing cars in the garage you used in Inwood and heard people call you Mr. Cory. I guess you didn't place him when you saw him there, but he placed you.

"Outside of these humiliations I didn't mind at all. Not because I'm broad-minded or generous but because you haven't meant anything to me for more years than I can remember. I let you have, with complete peace, the woman, freedom, and my Packard. However, you're not going to rob me.

"I suppose I could have told you a long while ago to stop all the fiction about Steve Flynn and your mythi-

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cal job. I thought, though, that it would be kind of cruel to let you know that I knew. It would have taken all the wind out of your sails, I'm sure. You must have felt like a very gay devil of a fellow deceiving your wife. I suppose you and the lady involved took every precaution of which your joint mentality thought. You probably grew delightfully frightened every time the bell rang lest it be me with a detective. I thought it all over but couldn't deprive you of that.

"As I say, Hubert, I had thought I was being perfectly decent to you. I even felt sorry for you when I saw you getting shabby-looking and noticed that you had to change and garage the car without service. Then, too, Jack—that's the young negro again—reported to Nellie that the Nash was gone, and I understood thoroughly. Please believe that I did not pump Jack or Nellie for information. I'm not above that sort of thing, but I wasn't interested. I thought of giving you a little money, but I changed my mind. What was the use? It would only mean one more idiotic action on your part or two or three—depending on how much I gave you. I decided not to offer you a penny. It never occurred to me that you would try to borrow from me. Good heavens, Hubert, the more I think of it the more fantastic it seems. You who never so much as bought a loaf of bread or a can of soup for the house when you had fifteen thousand dollars. And to think of giving me guff about a five-thousand-dollar investment. Why, you wouldn't even know how to invest it if you had the money. But of course you didn't intend to. You just wanted to ride high for a while with Miss Cory again

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and I could do without my five thousand. That's colossal nerve, Hubert.

"I dare say Miss Cory isn't a bad sort. I hold nothing against her, but she isn't going to have her roadster replaced on my money. I refuse to be robbed. I suppose I'm mean and unreasonable, but I don't like to lend five thousand dollars with absolutely no chance of its ever coming back.

"Now, I want to tell you something else, Hubert. What you tried to do today closes the long, tedious, senseless incident that was our life more or less together. You are no longer free to come to this house. I never want to see you again because I am no longer sorry for you, and that means that my last cordial feeling toward you is gone. If you have anything upstairs, please get it. I want no loose ends trailing about. This must be the finish. Don't invent a yearning to see your son as an excuse to return, Hubert. You know where he works, if the desire to see him overpowers you. I suppose it isn't necessary to add that you'll leave the Packard at the curb when you go. And please go soon, before this morning is spoiled. I shall always remember it and cherish it as an occasion upon which I exercised tremendous self-control. If I had chosen I could have been nasty."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

WHEN Hubert left the apartment Lillian went to the chair by the window. For once she did not gaze down into the hot, glittering street. Some strange impulse caused her to turn the chair so that she sat regarding the shabby, dusty little room. The door of the kitchenette closet was open and she saw a cake of yellow soap with coffee grounds clinging to it, an empty condensed-milk can, and water dripping with persistent dreariness from the unpolished faucet.

Hubert should not have gone out. His cold was very bad. She sighed. He really had had to go. She was fairly certain that he had gone to borrow money from one of his friends. She wondered which one. Would it be either of the McKay brothers? More likely, though, it would be a close friend rather than a business acquaintance. He really had to have some money. Anybody who saw him would recognize how necessary it was for him to have a doctor's care. Poor Hubert. A cold was rotten. She hoped that he wouldn't borrow much money. Money was so hard to repay, and they had one obligation now. Her ring would have to be redeemed. That would probably be around sixty dollars or so. Now if Hubert borrowed twenty-five today that would be all right. They'd only have around a hundred dollars to pay out when they got on their feet again.

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Lillian ran her hand over her thick, wavy hair. A sudden thought had come to her. Shocking and terrifying, it came like a jeer from an angry mob. She sank an inch lower in the chair and looked at the room and gave herself up to disquieting thoughts. There seemed to be a curious brittle silence. Everything waited with a pitying politeness while Lillian Cory's little brain struggled to encompass a fact. Only the water continued to drip into the sink with a nerve-racking regularity. The small room seemed to grow smaller and hotter. The furniture seemed shabbier, dustier, more rickety. She thought of the roaches, the people upstairs, the garbage-laden dumb-waiter. She thought of the butcher who never let her see the meat he chopped, the one unblemished pair of stockings she owned, the haircut she needed.

Was it true that things would never be better? That Hubert would never be on his feet again? She tried to brush the doubt from her mind, but it would not go, and she knew that it would not go because it belonged there. It was the truth. This period of getting by on nothing was not the tedious intermission she had thought it. This was the show. The two cars, the shopping orgies, the long drives and carefree days—*that* had been the intermission. Of course. Hubert had sold his business and had had money to burn. They had spent it. There was nothing now and he could not even get a job. Perhaps he was incompetent. Certainly. Funny how thick she had been. He was never going to be able to furnish another home for her, replace her roadster, or trick her out again in new outfits. He wasn't able to.

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He wasn't a slam-bang live wire of a business man. How could she have been so dense? Why, God, if he had had the brains it takes to hold a decent position he wouldn't have acted as he had with all that money.

She sat for a time musing on her stupidity and on Hubert's inadequacy. A couple of dumbbells, her and Hubert. Well, God must love dumbbells, He makes so many of them. That had been in a book she had read. Funny how she had been so dumb all the time and just now had realized it.

Trucks were passing her door with scraping and rumbling noises. Passenger cars were honking horns. Children were shrieking. The usual sounds of the street had recommenced. The moment of silence that had been given her was past now, but she had used it well. She was even satisfied to accept the truth and not try to cast it out by kidding herself.

She reviewed all that had passed through her mind in the last ten minutes. She was giving herself one last chance to find it all empty foolishness brought on by low spirits and worry. No, it was true.

When she was thoroughly satisfied that the facts which had presented themselves were honest, well-meaning facts she went to her bedroom and dressed.

She dressed quickly but carefully. She stopped to press her blue georgette dress but did it without waste of time. She was out of the house in twenty minutes.

When she came back it was noon. She looked hot and tired, but there was a new aliveness about her. She did not throw herself on the couch but began at once to straighten the apartment. She made the bed and

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washed the breakfast dishes. She mopped the floor in all the places that the rug didn't cover and she dusted thoroughly even into places that had not been reached since she had rented the apartment. She stopped once and ate a slice of bread and butter. When she was finished she went to the window to watch for Hubert.

It was a few minutes past one when he came. She saw him walking toward the house and she wondered about the car. Her first thought was that he had been in an accident which had completely destroyed the car but left him hale and hearty. She convinced herself that he had been to the garage first and had walked home to save himself a trip later. As he came toward her she studied his expression anxiously. Had he had any luck? How was he feeling? His expression told her nothing.

She thought it took him an unusually long time to reach the apartment. He probably was warm and ill. She drew away from the window and opened the door. She stood waiting on the threshold listening to his footsteps. Slow footsteps. If she hadn't seen Hubert coming she would have thought a very old man was climbing the stairs. He must be pretty sick.

He came in and sat down immediately. "Hello," he said. "God, it's hot."

"Yes. Why didn't you drive home? You could have taken the car back when you were more rested."

"I came down by train. That's what delayed me so. I had to wait for a train and then fell asleep and rode past my station and had to come back by subway and everything. It was a nuisance. What were you saying? Oh, the car? Why, I left it with Helen. She—she

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wanted to borrow it for a day or two. I hadn't the heart to keep refusing her any longer. It will probably be hell to get it back from her, but you know how she is. Excitable and all. She always liked the car, you know. I promised her once that sometime I'd let her take it for a day or two. I thought I'd better let her have it. We don't use it so much any more."

"No, of course not. I didn't know you were going to see Helen today, though."

"Neither did I. I met her on the street. Worse luck."

He didn't get any money. If he had he would have said so by now. She put her hand on his forehead. It felt hot. He was taking off his coat and there was a little breeze coming in at the window. Oh, he'd have pneumonia sure.

"Hubert, you're feverish and everything. Please go to bed."

"Go on. I'd roast to death in bed. I'll tell you what you can do for me, Lil. Run me a nice cold drink of water."

She turned the dripping faucet on full force and the water splashed on her arms and face in a vindictive little shower. She brought him the water.

"Thanks, Lil."

"You're welcome. Did you—did you see anybody today besides Helen?"

"No, Lil, I didn't. I'll tell you the truth. It might sound silly to you, but the training you get when you're a kid lasts all your life. My old man always hammered it into me that borrowing money was right next door to stealing it. I went up there today with full intentions

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of borrowing from Carl Feldman or the McKays or any of the dozen guys I know well, but I'll be damned, Lil, I couldn't bring myself to do it. I just couldn't. I wanted to, but I kept thinking of what my old man used to say and I swear I couldn't bring myself to going near one of them. They'd have given it to me. I know they would have, but I just couldn't ask."

"Well," said Lillian after a moment of thought, "if that's the way you are, you just are. I understand all right. It don't sound silly to me. I can figure people having funny little ideas. Only you feeling so rotten and all, I did hope that you would get some money. You wouldn't ask Helen, I suppose."

"That would be the same thing, Lil. Borrowing from her would be just like borrowing from anybody else. And worse because she's a woman."

"Yeh, that's right."

Lillian sat down. She looked at Hubert. He looked terribly beaten. Perhaps he had always known what she had just discovered that day. She thought he looked as though he would like to cry. That was probably her imagination. He was just warm and tired and perhaps a trifle blue. Men didn't really cry.

She watched him for a few seconds more. Presently she arose and crossed the room to the couch. She sat down beside him and put her arm around him.

"Honey," she said. Then again, very sternly, "Honey, listen. It's all right. We'll pull through. Listen, I went downtown today and got a job. Honestly I did. I start tomorrow. Handkerchiefs, of course. Now don't you worry. Wasn't that smart of me? Oh, go

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ahead, say it was smart. And listen, I'll run you a nice cool bath. How will that be? And later I'll take you on for a checker game."

She went to the bathroom and started the water running for his bath. It was only after he had bathed that she remembered that a cool bath would probably be dangerous with his cold. She worried quite some about it and played a very bad game of checkers.

Hubert cautioned her twice to keep her mind on the game. It was only, he revealed as he jumped one of Lillian's men, by strict concentration that he was able to beat her consistently.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

FIVE-THIRTY P.M. in the subway. Lillian Cory standing on the platform of a northbound train. God, what a crush. That fellow with the mustache seemed to think that he could push right through her if he kept trying. Why didn't people build department stores down at the Battery anyhow? Then shop girls who had been standing on their feet all day would be sure to get a seat. God, it was hot, too. A nice thunder shower, now. Well, not exactly now but right after she got indoors.

Crossing her eyes and looking downward, Lillian could see that her nose was shiny. Oh, the devil with it. In this heat a person couldn't be bothered. Gosh, it was only One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street. She wondered if the ride used to seem this long in the old days. Well, she'd get so again that she didn't mind it. It takes time to get back in the swing of things. After all, this was the first time she had seen a subway rush hour in nearly two years.

The train groaned and swayed as it went its way. Lillian was in no danger of falling, tightly packed in as she was by other warm, crushed individuals.

Outside One Hundred and Sixty-Eighth Street station the train paused in the darkness. Nobody knew why it paused but everybody wondered how long they would

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be delayed. It was no more than a minute that they waited there, but it would have stretched magically from ten to thirty minutes by the time the passengers repeated it at dinner that evening.

Inwood at last. Lillian stepped briskly down the stairs, rearranging her clothes as she walked. She went to the butcher's first and purchased two lamb chops. She said she wanted them cut thick. The butcher nodded and cut them thin. He knew very well that anybody who dealt there couldn't afford thick chops. Next door she bought a head of lettuce and a large tomato. She crossed Post Avenue and stopped at the drug store for a jar of Vaporub. A small jar.

Well, now that was done. She wondered how Hubert was. He was such a fool about that cold. She hoped that he hadn't been doing anything silly that would make him worse.

She was relieved to find him on the couch in the living-room. He was lying in his pajamas with a sheet drawn over him.

"Hello," he said.

"Hello. How are you?"

"All right, I guess. How was the job?"

"Fine. I think I'll like that store. Of course it's only the first day, but you can tell pretty much about it."

He nodded and she turned away to put the lamb chops to broil. He was glad she was home. It had been a miserable day. First of all he hadn't felt so awfully good. Then, too, he had been kind of worried about one thing and another. And lonesome. Now the Packard, for instance. Lillian would probably be asking for

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it soon. Oh, well, it was silly to worry about that. He could get around it all right. No use crossing a bridge till you come to it.

It looked good to see Lil flying about the place putting dishes on the table and washing the lettuce. He sure had missed her. Well, soon he'd be out all day too. Soon as this cold let up a little he'd get something to do. He'd see how fellows got those jobs driving cabs or laundry trucks or anything like that. Gee, a fellow couldn't starve. God knew that he was as smart as any guy holding down a big job with stenographers and office boys at his beck and call, but, Lord, he couldn't starve just because nobody else recognized ability. He was a good driver. He ought to be able to get a truck or a cab or something. If not, there were other jobs. He'd have to find out about them.

He wondered why Helen's refusal of help had suddenly made him see that he must buckle down and take any job at all. Was it because he had been depending on Helen to reach down and pull him out of his troubles? That couldn't be it. He wasn't the kind who depended on other people. He never had been that kind. Well, to hell with the cause of his waking up. The fact was that he had to pitch in and do something that would get him at least twenty-five bucks a week.

"Dinner's ready," Lillian said.

"All right." He pulled himself from the couch. One step and he was at the table. The plate before him bore a lamb chop, several lettuce leaves, and two slices of tomato. She had tried to make it look dainty, but he didn't notice, because he was very hungry.

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They ate in silence. Once Lillian asked him if he wanted more bread. He did and when she arose to cut it he asked for more lettuce, too.

Afterwards he went to the couch again and Lillian washed and dried the dishes.

The summer night came down over Inwood. The children summoned each other with strange calls somewhere between a yodel and a wail. A feeling of loneliness came over Lillian. All up and down the street there were groups of people talking and laughing. She wondered if Anna and Louise were somewhere together tonight. Perhaps Theresa was with them. They would all have bright-colored slippers and organdie dresses and would be laughing about something. They wouldn't even mention her name. Nobody ever again would mention her name. Her mother might once in a while; that is, if she was still alive.

A young woman paused in the street below Lillian's window. She had a trim figure, small, slim feet. She called, "Say, John Gilbert's up at the Dyckman tonight. Want to come?"

She was addressing the girl at the window above Lillian's. Besides, Lillian had known by her voice that it wasn't Theresa.

Hubert coughed. Lillian went to get the Vaporub. She had forgotten it till now.

"Say, Lil, don't put that on. I got to go out tomorrow and it might make matters worse if you smear me up. You know it opens the pores and all."

"What are you going out for?"

"I've got to get a job, Lil. Anything. You know,

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driving a cab or cashiering, or anything they'll take me for."

She bent low over the Vaporub jar as she unscrewed its cap. "Yes," she said, "I know. But don't go yet. Wait till you're better."

She sat down beside him. The jar was clasped idly in her fingers. He looked at her questioningly. She seemed to have forgotten what she had intended to do. Suddenly she turned and hugged him fiercely.

"Love me?" he asked.

"Don't be a clown."

"Gee, Lil, you're a good scout."

"Here, let me see your chest."

She took a blob of the Vaporub in her hand and began to massage him. He lay back with his eyes closed, submitting to her care.

The calls in the street continued. People greeted each other with loud hellos and left with equally loud good-bys.

"See you Sunday."

"Why don't you drop in sometime?"

"Here comes the crowd now."

Loud people shouting from window to window and across streets. Shouting even when they stood beside the person they addressed.

Hubert heard them. He opened his eyes but closed them again. Lillian thought it was as though he had opened his mouth to speak and had reconsidered.

She put a towel over his chest and buttoned his pajama coat, then went to sit by the window again.

The children's calls died away as the night grew

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older. Even the voices of the grown people were quieted as they sought their beds. A summer's night it might be, but there was work to be done tomorrow.

For the first time in her life Lillian wondered why God troubled to create mankind. Was it for the same reason that people kept pets? She stared up at the sky as she wondered. Its blue darkness reminded her that it was growing late. She, too, had work to do tomorrow. She sighed and picked up the clock. She set the alarm for seven.

Hubert turned and looked at her.

"Come on, ickle boy," she said. "Time we went beddy-byes."

"Yes, I suppose so." He got up. "Say, you know I was just laying there thinking how much alone you are. You haven't got a friend, Lil. Suppose something happened to me?"

"That's a sweet thought. I hate to discourage you, but you're pretty strong. Nothing will happen to you."

"I know. But suppose something did? Gee, you used to have so many friends—Theresa and Mary Jackson and Anna and Louise. Look, they're all gone."

"Oh, them," said Lillian. She was turning out the lights and she spoke carelessly over her shoulder. "To hell with them. They're only weak-kneed little no-accounts passing me up cold because I'm a kept woman. Come on, hon, get to bed."



